Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Consumers International, the global federation of consumer organizations and a signatory, together with IBFAN, to the Conflict of Interest Coalition statement, endorsed by 161 networks representing over 2000 NGOs.

We applaud WHO’s focus on the need to protect WHO’s integrity and public interest mandate from vested interests. We welcome the suggestion to harmonize the two WHO policies on engagement with NGOs and with the commercial sector.

Transparency and public disclosure of WHO’s interaction with NGOs and the Private Sector are crucial but not sufficient safeguards. WHO needs a comprehensive and specific policy on conflicts of interest with criteria that distinguishes between bodies with and without a commercial interest in WHO policies. A case-by-case approach will be subjective, insufficient and costly compared to objective criteria defining cut off points for acceptable levels of commercial involvement and funding. As many hybrid partnerships assist companies in the creation of markets, the water gets muddied and objective easily diverted. So the criteria must also cover the organisation’s mission and the composition of decision-making structures.

These bench marks should also frame WHO’s collaboration, consultation and accreditation process. Such a differentiation allows for hearing the views of the private sector while ensuring that all WHO’s relations and interactions with external bodies are guided by a clear policy that safeguards WHO’s norms and standard setting.

The COI Coalition has started work on a paper to help WHO distinguish between BINGOs, PINGOs, TANGOs, CONGOs, RINGOs etc. and looks forward to assisting WHO in development of a framework for interaction with the private sector.