

Statement by Medicus Mundi International to the 138th session of the Executive Board on agenda item 5.3 Framework of engagement with non-State actors - Report by the Director-General

Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to address the distinguished members of the EB on behalf of MMI and PHM.

The regulation of WHO's engagement with the private sector is a crucial aspect of the WHO Reform.

However, as it stands, the document constitutes a Trojan horse, which will legitimise the influence of private sector interests on the decision-making processes of the WHO. This is of deep concern as it places vested interests at the heart of an organisation which should value the right to health above all else.

FENSA is symbolic of a more fundamental issue - that of the WHO's independence, which is compromised by its financial crisis and crippling dependency on tightly earmarked voluntary contributions. This situation has led to the donor capture of WHO's operational agenda and gross misalignments between the priorities identified in the Assembly and the expenditures underwritten by donors. We urge MS to lift the dual freeze on the Programme Budget and on assessed contributions which severely limits WHO's functioning.

In addition to the donor chokehold there is a more insidious distortion being introduced into WHO's programme design models, namely the multi-stakeholder partnership. To construct every programme as a partnership with industry creates huge barriers to a proper analysis of the barriers to WHO's goals, including industry partners who are seriously conflicted regarding their interests in WHO programmes.

The WHO needs strong safeguards to protect it from undue influence from funders and conflicts of interests on the part of industry partners. A robust conflict of interest policy should also include appropriate protection of whistleblowers.

The discussion on FENSA has so far failed to provide a robust framework against undue influence. Until and unless this is addressed, WHO stands at risk of private sector capture and further loss of its integrity, independence, and credibility.

Thank you.

The statement will be delivered by Julie Steendam

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