

**Statement by Medicus Mundi International
to the 67th session of the World Health Assembly
on agenda item 13.1 ‘Follow up to the Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General
Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases’
delivered by Mariska Meurs**

Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to address the Assembly on behalf of Medicus Mundi International and the People’s Health Movement.

The control of NCDs is dependent on addressing their structural and social determinants including through national and global policies that constrain the tobacco, alcohol, food and beverages industries, from promoting their products in ways that are damaging to public health.

A major barrier to adopting such policies lies in the power of these industries to influence governments and the decisions adopted by WHO in advising governments. The history of the Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes testifies to the weakness of voluntary codes but there is continuing talk of multi-stakeholder collaboration rather than binding regulation to control the marketing of alcohol and junk food and beverages.

The policy space for effective regulatory strategies is shrinking rapidly. Bilateral and plurilateral trade and investment treaties, which include onerous investor state dispute settlement provisions, are becoming powerful tools for TNCs to challenge measures designed to protect public health.

In the current Australian case, the plain packaging of cigarettes is facing a challenge from industry under a bilateral investment treaty and also from a number of countries in the WTO. The threat of such legal challenges can undermine governments’ willingness to implement much needed health policies through “regulatory chill”. We urge WHO to ensure that the proposed Inter Agency Taskforce be mandated to address trade and investment issues and to ensure that such measures are not allowed to prevent necessary regulation for public health.

We urge the WHO and Member States to address risks of improper influence from the involvement of pharmaceutical companies in setting standards and norms for diagnosis and treatment of NCDs; and in the prominence of business groups and the industry in coalitions tasked to tackle NCDs.

Thank you