Dear Member and Friends,

The world is facing unprecedented times. First Europe, after East Asia the second global epicentre of the new SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, and then increasingly all countries worldwide have implemented historically unprecedented measures to curb the spread of the virus. The economic engine of globalization has ground to a dramatic halt in the last weeks and months since January 2020.

The crisis has dramatically impacted patients and families, has overburdened health systems and health workers, triggered unemployment, eviscerated livelihoods and curtailed the social and political rights of the people in almost all countries. As such, it is raising societal awareness about the fact that public universal healthcare is the most important global good, and that international cooperation particularly when dealing with health emergencies, is crucial. And the WHO, as the UN agency responsible for global health, is occupying the centre of the geopolitical stage, where the US-China conflict is being played out. This is also raising the profile and challenging the mission of the Geneva Global Health Hub (G2H2).

Thanks to its growing membership, increasing number of activities, and a very professional secretariat, G2H2 is now recognized as a uniquely independent, competent, multidisciplinary space for information sharing, policy dialogue and technical reflection on global health. The value of our autonomy cannot be overstated, especially at this inflexion point in global health policy. Our freedom of initiative and collective outreach capacity give G2H2 considerable scope to interact not only with WHO officials and individual Member States, but also with technical experts and the academics from all over the world.

Although our funding has always been tight, we have succeeded in developing our base in the Geneva public health community, constantly attracting new memberships from entities associated with health, food and nutrition, and health financing, among other sectors. As a self-funded entity that relies on membership fees – a topic we raised in the 2019 AGM – our sustainability remains a key priority for G2H2.

Andreas Wulf
President
2019 WAS A “NORMAL” YEAR...

Since we are still in the middle of the global Covid19 health crisis, it is a bit difficult to look back at a “normal” year of work, such as 2019 was, knowing already that the next annual report will be quite different.

The past year was a normal one for the G2H2 secretariat. We did what we planned to do, as secretariat, in collaboration with the Steering Committee and as part of broader teams set up for particular tasks. We did what the Geneva Global Health Hub was set up to do in 2016: We created spaces for civil society involved in global health policies and governance, we acted as a communication hub, and we convened and facilitated civil society advocacy.

Our member also reacted to this “normally.”

Expectations. With our activities and deliverables well established, some members started thinking (dreaming) again of more, of moving the Hub to a next level. A tension that was present since G2H2 was conceived as a civil society project has re-emerged: Should G2H2 move beyond its “service provision” mode and use the growing recognition and its convening, and networking power to “really” advance the global health agendas articulated by civil society? And if so, how should this be done? This has become an issue in 2020.

Engagement. G2H2’s first four years showed that members are willing to actively engage in particular projects and tasks. In 2018, we had a strong and effective task team focusing on the jubilee of the Alma Ata Declaration and organizing a powerful civil society meeting that resonated in the later official jubilee events. In 2019, we had a similarly strong and well organized G2H2 working group on “WHO and global health governance and financing” established at the end of 2018, covered later in the current report. The “normal” challenge for G2H2 members is the difficulty of sustaining working groups over the long term while taking care of their own daily organizational business. All the G2H2 task teams set up in the past years have had their own “life cycles”.

Support. Last, but not least, we have had the “normal” experience that our achievements make us look bigger and stronger than we actually are. We “punch above our weight.” Our members tend to forget how small, and how structurally and financially weak G2H2 still is, with a secretariat mandate of only 30 days a year, a budget of roughly 30’000 CHF, and our total financial dependence on fees and donations provided by our members. Which is related to another “new normal” in these times: since civil society organizations have less funding to invest in advocacy and networking projects, some of our formerly better resourced members have had to reduce their projected financial support. As a result, G2H2 closed the year with zero financial assets, triggering an urgent call to our members to strategize about structural underfunding. Section 3 of this report addresses this issue, which will definitely be with us in 2020 and beyond.

Looking forward to this, thanks for all support.

Thomas Schwarz
Executive Secretary
G2H2 in 2019: Activities, Achievements, and Ambitions

The Hub’s activities in the past year were based on a two-year work plan (2019-2020) adopted by the Annual General Meeting in May 2019. Our Annual Report follows the structure of the work plan which is the third formal G2H2 planning document after the initial 2016 work plan adopted by the Constitutive Assembly in May 2016 and the 2017-2018 biannual plan adopted in 2017.

1. Networking Communication and Collaboration

Core functions of the hub are networking, communication, and collaboration, all of which complement our mandate to convene and facilitate civil society strategizing and advocacy.

Following an initial phase of setting up basic communication platforms and tools provided and fed by the G2H2 secretariat, and after initial experiences with G2H2 working groups, the 2019-2020 work plan states that efforts shall focus on promoting and consolidating mutual, “horizontal” sharing and collaboration, further involving and engaging members in thematic and task related work.

In particular, G2H2 members or groups of members are invited set up formal or informal working groups according to their needs and capacity. Working groups can be either thematic or process/task/action oriented (task teams). Although working groups and task teams are supported by the secretariat, they are expected to be member organized and run. They can include both G2H2 members and non-members. In 2019, there was only one active thematic working group.

1.1. G2H2 Working Group on WHO and Global Health Governance and Financing

The G2H2 Working Group on “WHO and global health governance and financing” was launched in December 2018, after strategic conversations in the Steering Committee, and with members, about how G2H2 could become more vocal. The assumption underlying this experimental “advocacy working group” was that some WHO developments needed immediate civil society attention, such as:

- Initial evaluation of the implementation of the WHO Framework on Engagement with non-State Actors (2019) and new plans for a “WHO Strategy on Engagement with non-State actors”;
- “Transformation of WHO” (as announced by DG Dr Tedros) with still unclear scope and consequences;
- Reform of WHO Governing Bodies and the prospect of further shrinking of civil society space;
- Interaction of the new WHO leadership with various “civil society” teams and related governance issues (such as the “WHO-CSO Task Team,” which delivered its recommendations on 7 December 2018);
- WHO financing: “Investment case” launched in autumn 2018 and related creation of “CSO Advisory Group” by the WHO Secretariat;
- Preparation of a “Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All” and related governance issues, including civil society representation.
Critical observation and commentary on WHO governance and financing is part of the DNA and history of the Geneva Global Health Hub. The engagement of many civil society organizations that are “critical friends” of the WHO,” and their need to share assessments, strategize and coordinate interventions, drove the 2015-2016 incorporation and development of G2H2. Over the last years, civil society advocates have focused on such WHO governance issues as:

- Protecting WHO’s constitutional mandate;
- Engaging in critical assessment of actors, power, interests (including Member States);
- Addressing shrinking civil society space (global, national);
- Discussing WHO financing as a global public good;
- Defending WHO’s leading role in global health governance;
- Evaluating WHO leadership, management, and capacity to fulfil its mandate.

In its Terms of Reference, the mandate and initial tasks of the G2H2 governance working group were framed as follows:

- Gather and share intelligence about critical processes and actors related to WHO governance and financing;
- Engage members and, designated working group representatives in conversations with the WHO Secretariat and other key actors;
- Provide a space for sharing and deepening the analysis of key issues and processes related to WHO governance and financing, and for the development of related civil society positions and demands;
- Convene regular civil society gatherings (sharing, brainstorming and/or strategizing) on these WHO related issues and processes, as part of the G2H2 meetings ahead of the meetings of the WHO Governing Bodies in January and May;
- Support and facilitate specific civil society advocacy interventions at the WHO secretariat, the WHO Governing Bodies, the WHO member states and their Geneva missions;
- If feasible/in the medium term: provide a hub to link analysis and advocacy related to WHO governance and financing with civil society institutions and advocates engaged in global health governance and the financing of non-WHO related global goods.

Chapter 2 of the report covers the January and May meetings and follow-up activities convened and coordinated by this working group.
1.2. COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS, TOOLS AND SERVICES

The Geneva Global Health Hub has continued to provide its members with some concrete tools for information sharing, allowing them to strategize, communicate, and exchange information and experience throughout the year. The G2H2 website provides basic information on the Hub’s meetings and publications and updates on current Geneva global health meetings, consultations, and other opportunities for civil society to engage in global health processes. Our “WHA TODAY” overview of formal meetings and informal World Health Assembly side events attracted considerable attention.

On Twitter, the secretariat provides updates on global health processes, events involving Geneva based institutions, and the activities and positions of its members. “Tweeting” is done both as a service to our members and to promote our activities among other civil society organizations and interested parties. Our more than 4400 “followers” (up from 3000 at the end of 2018) are an indication of, and contribute to, our growing visibility. Since Twitter has become a key WHO communications channel, we are happy to know that Dr Tedros and other senior officials follow, and sometimes retweet us.

The internal mailing list (“G2H2-members”) launched in 2017 has provided the secretariat and G2H2 members with a direct, interactive and “horizontal” communication line to share information, network, and promote collaboration. In 2019, traffic in this communication channel increased considerably.

2. CONVENING AND FACILITATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY STRATEGIZING AND ADVOCACY

A core G2H2 task is to convene and facilitate civil society strategizing and advocacy. The Hub aims to provide a space for civil society to meet, share knowledge, develop proposals, and advocate for more democratic global health governance. The two annual in-person civil society meetings we organize in Geneva (January and May 2019) support this task. Detailed documentation is available on our website.

23 JANUARY 2019
CIVIL SOCIETY MEETING AHEAD OF THE 144TH SESSION OF THE WHO EXECUTIVE BOARD

As the 144th Session of the WHO Executive Board opened on a Thursday, rather than Monday, G2H2’s related civil society meeting took place on Wednesday (23 January 2019), kindly hosted by the World Council of Churches at the Ecumenical Centre. The meeting was dedicated to Amit Sengupta (1958-2018) of the People’s Health Movement, whose untimely death was reported in November last year. The meeting opened with a short film tribute to Amit who was a driving force in G2H2.

In a short morning session, representatives of the People’s Health Movement WHO Watch team, presented three EB agenda items: Universal Health Coverage; Health, Environment and Climate; and Medicines, Vaccines and Health Products. This was followed by an open discussion, which benefited from the participation of some senior representatives of the WHO secretariat and provided a space to debate and “test drive” selected civil society analysis and proposals.

Focus on WHO Governance

The afternoon session was set up as a closed (civil society only) brainstorming and strategy meeting. In this session, the G2H2 working group on “WHO governance and financing” provided an overview of current governance issues and processes at WHO that need civil society attention.
17-18 MAY 2019

CIVIL SOCIETY MEETING AHEAD OF THE 72ND WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

WHO, civil society and ‘non-State actors’: How to deal with a difficult relationship

A full-day workshop on Friday 17 May built on the January WHO governance session, and re-focussing on:

- Reform of WHO Governing Bodies and the prospect of further shrinking civil society space;
- Interaction of the new WHO leadership with various “civil society” teams;
- WHO engagement with non-State actors, FENSA evaluation;
- Strategies of the new WHO leadership for engaging with non-State actors (“partners”);
  including philanthropic foundations and the private sector based on / beyond FENSA.

The workshop deepened the analysis (“what’s the problem?”) and moved towards strategizing and cooperating (“what needs to be done, what we can do together?”).

Civil society perspectives on selected global health topics: 72nd World Health Assembly and beyond

The civil society meeting continued on Saturday, 18 May, following the G2H2 AGM, and concluded with a series of public briefings and debates with invited guests, on the following topics:

- Universal Health Coverage, Privatization and Power
- Who cares about/for Planetary Health?
- Fair medicine prices and expanded access for all: what leadership and guidance can we expect from WHO?
- How to influence the Global Action Plan on Healthy Lives and Well-being (GAP)?

The Saturday meeting took place at the Maison des Associations.

“TOWARDS A MORE MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT OF WHO WITH CIVIL SOCIETY”

“The involvement of the people and public interest civil society is most relevant at national, regional and global level. It’s about democracy. It’s about accountability and good governance. Also for WHO, and referring to Art. 18 and 71 of the WHO Constitution and to the spirit of former WHO “civil society initiatives” we believe that a space for meaningful civil society engagement is both fundamental and instrumental for WHO and its work.” (G2H2 members, May 2019)

Civil society organizations have followed closely the various “WHO transformation processes” and governance reforms taking place under the new WHO leadership of Dr Tedros, taking particular interest in a discussion launched among WHO Member States at the end of 2018 that resulted in reports and proposals by the WHO Secretariat on “how to achieve a more meaningful engagement of civil society in the WHO Governing Bodies”.

In January 2019, the G2H2 secretariat initiated the discussion about these proposals with the blog “Civil society engagement with the World Health Organization: Towards a new era of partnership or defending a shrinking space?”. Throughout 2019, this topic kept G2H2 members and the working group on “WHO and global health governance and financing” busy, with peaks in January and May and again in December (ahead of the sessions of the WHO Executive Board).

In May, and under the overall slogan that “WHO needs a strong and vocal civil society, and civil society needs a strong WHO”, members of G2H2 published a joint critical assessment of the report by the
WHO secretariat on „WHO governance reform processes: Involvement of non-State actors“ (Document EB 145/4). The assessment acknowledged the need to reform the WHO Governing Bodies while rejecting some of the Secretariat’s concrete proposals and requesting an open, transparent and timely public consultation on the reform of the governing body meetings, in a proper conversation with civil society on exploring a broad range of options for a more meaningful engagement.

In December, after a consultation undertaken by the WHO secretariat, the publication of the consultation report, and an online briefing convened by the WHO secretariat, the G2H2 working group invited members and other civil society colleagues to two online meetings. At these meetings, participants shared insights and deepened the assessment of both the reform process and the concrete secretariat proposals with a view to shaping civil society positions for the WHO EB meeting in January 2020.

In times of the Covid-19 pandemic, and just having issued a civil society call to “rally behind the WHO”, looking back at the past year’s activism related to the WHO governance reform leaves us with mixed feelings. Our advocacy was successful, yes. The WHO Executive Board, in January 2020, acknowledged the need to go beyond managerial solutions and revisit the core ingredients for effective engagement with civil society.

But obviously, some of the “big problems” of good times shrink in the bad times. Obviously, the current crisis facing the World Health Organization and democratic multilateralism today far outweigh the shortcomings of WHO governing body meetings. And the challenge of shrinking civil society space goes far beyond defending territory staked out by “non-state actors in official relations” with WHO. WHO is indeed in the spotlight of international politics right now, facing the very concrete threat of losing its status as the coordinating and directing organization for international health by becoming a mere “moderator and convener” of all kinds of multi-stakeholder initiatives, and enthusiastically engaging with the commercial and philanthropic sector, just so long as they provide the support WHO desperately needs. But this will be the topic of next year’s annual report, looking back at 2020 as the first year of the Coronavirus pandemic.
3. Governance, Accountability, Institutional Development

G2H2 convened its third Annual General Assembly on 18 May 2019 at the Maison des Associations in downtown Geneva. Participating members welcomed the new organizations that joined G2H2 over the previous year, bringing the total number of members to 34 (May 2019):

- Difäm (Germany)
- Global Policy Forum (Germany)
- Health Law Institute (Switzerland)
- International Federation on Ageing (IFA)
- Memisa (Belgium)
- ProVeg International

The G2H2 Steering Committee elected in 2018 still comprises:

- Andreas Wulf, Medico International (President)
- Katherine Pettus, International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care (Secretary)
- Nicoletta Dentico, Health Innovation in Practice (Treasurer)
- Ann Lindsay
- Garance Upham
- Patrick Kadama, African Centre for Global Health and Social Transformation
- Remco van de Pas, Medicus Mundi International Network
- Baba Aye, Public Services International

The G2H2 Secretariat continues to be hosted by the Medicus Mundi International Network at its Geneva office, based on a Secretariat agreement defining its role and scope of work. The Executive Secretary, currently the only employed G2H2 staff, implements the mandate and leads the day-to-day management of the Hub. At the Annual General Meeting, the Steering Committee and the members again expressed their appreciation for the contributions and engagement of the Secretariat.

Institutional Sustainability and Development

While overall G2H2 governance and in particular the interaction between the different components (members, working groups, SC, secretariat, AGM) run smoothly, the Steering Committee has paid particular attention to the structural capacity problem at the secretariat (only 30 days/year) and the related challenge of financial sustainability, with no solution in sight.

At the end of the year, the Steering Committee faced the concrete issue that, given reduced voluntary contributions from member organizations, the Hub, which is set up as an association under Swiss law, risked financial failure, with a larger deficit than existing assets could cover. Thanks to some last minute pledges by member organizations, this was averted. But as G2H2 closed the year 2019 with a net equity of 228.53 CHF (!), the financial situation was far from resolved, and the discussion and concrete proposals about how to overcome the Hub’s structural underfunding continues in 2020.

Despite these challenges, we are looking ahead with confidence. G2H2 is a good thing, and if we weren’t here, we would need to invent ourselves! Thanks to all who, over the last year and in ongoing interaction with the Steering Committee and Secretariat, have expressed your appreciation, support, and co-ownership.