

From Informal civil society task group “WHO Civil Society Commission”
To WHO DG Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus Adhanom and leadership team
Date 11 January 2021
Subject Outline of proposed “WHO Civil Society Commission”

Dear Dr Tedros and Team,

We refer to the civil society [input paper](#) for a [dialogue meeting](#) with WHO Director-General Dr Tedros on “Social participation and accountability within and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic”, on 13 October 2020. The civil society co-conveners of this meeting then proposed to Dr Tedros to “establish a permanent mechanism for strategically dealing with issues related to WHO and social participation and accountability by setting up a permanent WHO-civil society commission (...)”.

Dr Tedros showed great interest in this proposal and invited the team of civil society co-conveners of the dialogue meeting to start the process of building a WHO Civil Society Commission or similar permanent mechanism.

A civil society [follow-up meeting on 27 October](#) concluded with the agreement of participants to set up an informal task group to provide an initial outline or working document for the proposed WHO Civil Society Commission. The *ad hoc* task group started working in early December 2020 and since then, through meetings and an online drafting process, assessed various options, specified key elements of the proposed Commission and concluded its initial work with agreeing on the current outline to be shared with the WHO Secretariat.

We kindly invite the WHO Secretariat to consider this outline as it is intended by our task group: an invitation to continue collaborating in putting Dr Tedros’ words into action.

We hope and are confident that the Secretariat will confirm its interest and availability for setting up such a Commission or similar permanent mechanism and initiate a process that will hopefully lead to its implementation by mid-2021.

This process should include reaching out to a wider civil society constituency beyond our task group, collecting input and feedback on the proposal and preparing the ground for a broad civil society engagement in this initiative. It is expected and welcomed that WHO will also engage in internal consultations regarding the proposed Commission, including discussion within the Executive Board and consultations with Member States.

We look forward to hearing from you again on this matter.

Thanks for your attention, and best regards



Thomas Schwarz, Medicus Mundi International Network / G2H2

For the ad hoc task team (list of members: see annex)

Outline: “WHO Civil Society Commission”

The outline includes the following elements:

1. Overall setup and mandate
2. References
3. Composition and terms of participation
4. Modalities of work, and support by WHO

The further planning process is expected to include the drafting of proper Terms of Reference for the WHO Civil Society Commission and related bodies (Secretariat, Civil Society Reference Group or similar structure) that go beyond this outline.

Overall setup and mandate

The WHO Civil Society Commission (“the Commission”) shall be set up as a permanent body, based on agreed mandate and Terms of Reference that will specify the main elements to be explicitly defined or regulated, and convened by the WHO Director-General.

The mandate of the WHO Civil Society Commission shall focus on key issues related to relationships between WHO and civil society. The Commission will build on and draw from the experiences of new and existing civil society platforms and instruments for working with the WHO.

The WHO Civil Society Commission shall, in particular:

- Monitor and strengthen the state of civil society relations and civic space in WHO and all WHO and global health governance processes and fora, including partnerships and platforms in which WHO is engaged;
- Provide information and advice to the WHO Director-General and to the WHO member states (via DG and Executive Board);
- Foster open, constructive institutional relations between WHO (all levels) and civil society, and take up related initiatives, proposals and requests from international, regional, national and local civil society;
- Explore, initiate, promote and monitor the development of a core set of related instruments, potentially including the following:
 - Civil society desks / focal points at all levels of WHO (country and regional offices, and HQ);
 - Permanent WHO - civil society dialogue platform to facilitate timely civil society input and engagement with WHO on a variety of political and technical issues;
 - Guidelines and collection of good practice in fields such as public hearings and consultations;
 - World Health Assembly resolution on social participation and accountability;
 - Other instruments for civil society and WHO engagement as identified during the planning process and in the future, including by and for other civil society mechanisms.

- Follow-up on WHO engagement in UN initiatives on civic space;
- Support mutual accountability between civil society groups and WHO, on implementation of agreed actions, commitments and instruments;
- Periodically report to the broader civil society constituency, WHO and its member States and the general public about the state of WHO - civil society relations and civic space at WHO.
- Make information about the Commission and its progress available via designated communication channels.

Further output of the Commission shall be defined via its initial and periodic work plans.

References

The Commission shall build on the experience of other WHO Commissions convened by the Director-General.

The Commission shall take into account relevant initiatives for improving relations between WHO and civil society, notably the following:

- WHO Civil Society Initiative (2002-2004), with its report [WHO and civil society: linking for better health](#)
- WHO Civil Society Task Team (2018), with its report [“Together For The Triple Billion. A new era of partnership between the World Health Organization \(WHO\) and civil society”](#)
- Civil society DG [dialogue meeting](#), 13 October 2020 with its panel on “WHO to consistently deal with institutional civil society interaction as a matter of social accountability”

The Commission shall consider and respect existing formal guidance on WHO engagement with non-State Actors, notably the WHO Framework on Engagement with non-State Actors (FENSA) and recent documents related to the participation of non-state actors in WHO Governing Bodies such as [EB148/35](#).

Composition and terms of participation

The WHO Civil Society Commission shall consist of:

- 10-15 civil society Commissioners, including two co-chairs
- WHO Director-General or designated representative (member of leadership team)
- Further representatives of all three levels of WHO (ex officio, terms to be defined)
- Representatives of the WHO Executive Board (ex officio, terms to be defined)

Terms of participation

- The Commissioners shall be members in their personal capacity and contribute to the matters addressed by the Commission according to their best knowledge and experience.

- Civil society members of the Commissioners shall be appointed by the WHO DG for a term of three years (rotation of members' terms on a staggered basis), from a list of candidates nominated by the Civil Society Reference Group of the Commission (see below) and based on a call for expressions of interest.
- The Commission shall be balanced in age, gender and regional representation. It shall include representatives of different civil society sub-constituencies (such as: social movements, faith based organizations, NGOs, trade unions, academia, thematic and professional associations/federations, patients groups and people with disabilities). Commissioners need to be conversant with the WHO governance and operational modalities.
- A no-confidence clause shall allow Commissioners to be removed for not doing their jobs and for acting against the interests of the WHO and/or civil society.

Modalities of work, and support by WHO

The Bureau of the Commission shall consist of the WHO DG or his/her designated representative and the two civil society co-chairs.

The Commission shall be convened by its Bureau periodically. The Commission shall normally meet via online platform and refer to online work spaces provided by its secretariat.

To accomplish its tasks, and in particular the development of a core set of instruments for improving institutional relations between WHO and civil society, the Commission shall, as adequate,

- convene working groups and tasks teams;
- invite experts from beyond its membership;
- hold public hearings and calls for open submissions;
- engage and consult widely with relevant constituencies.

A Civil Society Reference Group (or similar structure; terms to be defined in a next step) shall link the Commission and its civil society representatives to wider civil society, so that the Commission can draw on input by actors who are not formally represented on the Commission or who may provide ad hoc information or advice.

The Commission shall be supported in its work by a secretariat (terms to be defined in a next step). The secretariat shall support the Bureau in the day-to-day work of the Commission including the preparation of background materials, organization of consultations and meetings, translation, organizational arrangements, logistics, and communications associated with the work of the Commission.

WHO shall provide further support to the Commission as required by the Bureau, and based on an agreed work plan and budget.

Annex

Members of informal civil society task group “WHO Civil Society Commission”

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Baba Aye	Public Services International, G2H2
Carthi Mannikarottu	WACI Health , CSEM
Eliana Monteforte*	MSH, CSEM
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Lucile Hermant	Action against Hunger France
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Renu Khanna	COPASAH
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*main contacts at initial co-conveners of the task group

**Thomas Schwarz also currently acting as informal "secretariat" of the task group

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