

Are global civil society organizations still relevant at the UN organizations?

WHO Executive Board, January 2022

- Modalities of civil society participation
- Document EB150/37

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150th session of the WHO Executive Board, 24-29 January 2022 – Hybrid meeting.
Practical information for delegates of non-State actors
in official relations with the World Health Organization (WHO)

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EXECUTIVE BOARD
150th session
Provisional agenda item 21.2

EB150/37
13 December 2021

WHO reform

Involvement of non-State actors in WHO's governing bodies

Report by the Director-General

1. In February 2020, the Executive Board, at its 146th session, noted the report by the Director-General on WHO reform: Involvement of non-State actors in WHO's governing bodies,¹ and requested the Secretariat to submit a revised version of the report to the Board at its 148th session, including more details of the proposed informal meeting between non-State actors, Member States and the Secretariat. The Board also requested that non-State actor constituency statements should be introduced on a trial basis for a limited number of agenda items.

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“The World Health Assembly is the decision-making body of WHO. It is attended by delegations from all WHO Member States and focuses on a specific health agenda prepared by the Executive Board. “





Our space



A blurred and confusing space...



Our input and participation

"Involvement of non-state actors": (recent) history of proposals

EB144/34 JAN 2019	WHO reform processes: Report of the Executive Board Chairperson on the outcome of the informal consultation on governance reform (here)	< informal member states consultation, 2018
EB145/4 MAY 2019	WHO governance reform processes: Involvement of non-State actors. Report by the Director-General (here)	> Tensions («transparency») > online consultation of NSAs
EB146/33 JAN 2020	WHO reform: Involvement of non-State actors in WHO's governing bodies. Report by the Director-General (here)	> some proposals dropped
EB148/35 JAN 2021	WHO reform: Involvement of non-State actors in WHO's governing bodies. Report by the Director-General (here)	> pilots at WHA74 followed by review
EB150/37 JAN 2022	WHO reform: Involvement of non-State actors in WHO's governing bodies. Report by the Director-General (here)	

The proposals

EB144/34 JAN 2019	(a) Non-State actors are encouraged to post their statements two weeks in advance of the meeting in order to allow Member States, if they so wish, to take them into account while formulating their own positions.
	(b) Incentives could be created for non-State actors in official relations to speak as clusters or constituencies . A limited number of speaking slots for non-State actors per session of the World Health Assembly and the Executive Board could be considered.
	(c) The Chairperson should exercise his or her discretion to ensure an effective discussion, including with respect to the time allotted for statements . Non-State actors will have timely notice of allocation of time for their interventions.
	(d) To consider continuing discussions on organizing an informal meeting with non-State actors in official relations . A concept note reflecting the informal consultation's discussions will be circulated before EB144 to facilitate further discussions.

Civil society discussions and workshops (selection)

G2H2 Jan 2019	Reform of WHO Governing Bodies and perspectives of a further shrinking space for civil society Sub-session at civil society meeting (here)
G2H2 Jan 2020	Defending the space of civil society at the WHO Sub-session at civil society meeting (here)
G2H2 Jan 2021	What reform agenda for the WHO Executive Board? Sub-session at series of briefings and debates (here)
MMI June 2021	Promote civic space at the WHO and other UN bodies and agencies ...and defend democratic multilateralism (here)
G2H2 Jan 2022	Are global civil society organizations still relevant at the UN organizations? Civil society workshop organized by IAHPHC (here)

Selected input/positions

Blog Thomas Schwarz January 2019	Civil society engagement with the WHO: Towards a new era of partnership or defending a shrinking space? (here)
Open letter by TS to WHO EB, January 2019	Good governance starts at home (here)
Paper signed by various organizations and individuals, May 2019	Towards a more meaningful engagement of WHO with civil society. An initial assessment of the report of the WHO secretariat to the 145th Session of the WHO Executive Board, 29-30 May 2019 (here)
Input to DG Dialogue October 2020	"In its own fields of work and related institutional processes and arenas, WHO to consistently deal with civil society engagement as a matter of social participation and accountability" (here)



Towards a more meaningful
engagement of WHO with
civil society

Selected input/positions

I do not need to repeat what Dr Chan and Dr Tedros – and some member states, too – have stated about the mess with the WHO governing body meetings, about the often useless and mainly promotional (how important the issue is, how engaged everybody is in addressing it) and repetitive talking, and about the urgent need for an effectively structured and really interactive debate. And beyond this, about the need to more meaningfully position and use the EB sessions and the World Health Assembly in the political and normative processes of the WHO – an effort still to be undertaken. But with your recommendations, you do not address the core of the issue – because this would hurt you a bit, you would need to change a bit yourselves. And it looks as if you are not ready for this. So you rather address some symptoms instead. I focus on the one that hurts us: With your proposals outlined under item E, page 10, as measures to “stimulate the participation of non-State actors in official relations in governing bodies meetings”, you will complicate, restrict or even hinder meaningful civil society engagement in WHO governing bodies. You will cause us a real problem, but you will not resolve yours. (TS, January 2019)



Towards a more meaningful engagement of WHO with civil society

Selected input/positions

WHO needs a strong and vocal civil society, and civil society needs a strong WHO

Considering health a global public good and a matter of social justice, we support all efforts to reconfirm and strengthen WHO's role as global health authority whose main task is to guarantee and promote this public good at an international level, despite a more and more confusing global governance.

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. In this sense, we limit our assessment on how to achieve a more meaningful engagement of WHO with civil society (and not with "non-State actors"). – read it all [here](#)

After EB146: Status of implementation of new modalities

Formal proposals	Status	By
Annual World Health Forum outside WHA and EB	Not supported by MS	EB145
Ahead of WHA: Informal meeting between Member States and NSA (EB150 to provide guidance)	Pilot: WHA74 Further pilot: WHA 75	EB148 EB150
Incentives for non-state actors to deliver a limited number of grouped statements by "broad constituencies" on particular agenda items. No individual statements shall be allowed for these items. (EB150 to provide guidance)	Pilot: WHA74 Perpetuated: EB150 Further pilot: WHA 75	EB146 Secretariat EB150
Limitation of number of individual statements to a maximum of three per non-State actor	Not supported by MS	EB146
Limitation of size of delegations to a maximum of 25 delegates	Not supported by MS	EB146

After EB146: Modalities informally or inconsistently introduced

	Status	By
Further restriction of speaking time for non-state actors (one minute as new standard)	Implemented	EB Bureau Secretariat
Only "virtual" access of non-state actors to Governing Body meetings, due to Covid-19, but also valid for "hybrid" WHA Special Session	Implemented	WHA Bureau Secretariat
For agenda items with constituency statements: no possibility for individual statements from non-State actors	Not implemented at WHA74, but at EB150	EB Bureau Secretariat
Other?		

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Some conclusions and open questions

- How to overcome their “divide and rule”?
- What to expect from “civil society engagement strategy” and “WHO civil society commission” (both in the making)
- Relevance of our “suffering” compared with shrinking civic space and oppression at national level
- How to promote civil society participation in WHO governance and at the same time oppose increasing influence of corporate sector due to “multistakeholder” approach and FENSA setup (non-state actors?)

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Thank you!

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