PRESENTATION OF THE PROJECT OF A WHO CIVIL SOCIETY COMMISSION

What is it, and where are we with it?

Lucile Hermant, Action Contre la Faim
Member of the civil society interest group
THE PROJECT OF A WHO CIVIL SOCIETY COMMISSION

What is it?

- Project to set up a permanent body, representative of civil society in all its diversity, to provide strategic advice to the WHO on how to improve its engagement with civil society.

- Initiated by an informal civil society group (14 international and national organisations and networks)
  - Dialogue series between WHO Director-General Dr Tedros and civil society on social participation and accountability within and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic (Oct 2020)

Outline sent to WHO Secretariat in January 2021, proposing:

- **Mandate:** Monitor and strengthen the state of civil society relations and civic space in WHO and all WHO and global health governance processes and fora
  - through advice, relaying initiatives and requests, development of instruments, supporting mutual accountability

- **Composition:**
  - Mixed; co-chaired by civil society representatives; with members of Secretariat and WHO Executive Board;
  - Requirements: balanced in age, gender, regional and constituencies’ representation;

- **Modalities of work:**
  - Coordination by a Bureau reporting to a larger network
  - Concrete leverage (working groups, experts, public hearings, consultations…)
  - Support from WHO on agreed administrative and budget issues

- Based on previous relevant initiatives (WHO civil society initiative, task team and dialogue meetings)
THE PROJECT OF A WHO CIVIL SOCIETY COMMISSION
How has the WHO Secretariat engaged with it?

- High-level interest and approval by WHO Director General
  - October 2020 then August 2021 - Dr Tedros
    "Let us create this mechanism together"

- Sustained engagement and technical and tactical support from WHO Secretariat
  - Convening of follow-up dialogue meetings (August and November 2021)
  - Translation of the civil society outline into official WHO Terms of Reference format
  - Advice on positioning of the Commission within WHO governance structure
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Where are we with it?

- Current state since December 2021: draft Terms of Reference

- Aligned features
  - **Vision and goal:**
    - Advancing public health outcomes
    - Diverse, inclusive, transparent and accountable Commission
    - Advice on WHO *strategic* engagement with civil society at all levels (global, regional, national)
    - Possibility for CSOs to contribute to WHO governance processes
    - Commit to mutual learning
  - **Structure and means:**
    - WHO’s budget for Secretariat support and day-to-day operations
    - Goal to establish mechanisms to strengthen WHO collaboration with CS (focal points, dialogue platforms…)
    - Creation of outcome-oriented working groups
- Asks for reconsideration shared by selected CSOs in December 2021 (letter + alternative draft):
  - Process: more legitimacy
    - Proper consultation of civil society at large
  - Mandate and principles: achieving actual joint decision-making
    - Inclusive membership (gender, age, geography, income settings, health status, level of formality)
    - Proper advisory body > consultative entity
  - Governance, structure: better suited means to achieve participatory ambitions
    - A Commission, referring to a broader representative Network and led by a Steering Committee
      - Composed of members identified by the network and ratified by WHO
    - A Secretariat supporting the Commission in its administrative tasks (not overseeing)
      - Managed both by WHO (host) and CS co-chairs
    - Resources: support of Commission’s members’ and co-chairs’ positions?
  - Commission’s activities: sufficient room for manoeuvre
    - Publications, set of instruments, guidance, etc.
    - Adequate pace of work (regularity of meetings, etc.)
  - WHO prerogatives: to clarify
    - Right not to consider CS commission’s inputs: specify conditions
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Thank you!

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