

Press Release

Immunizing WHO Pandemic Treaty Negotiations Against Pandemic Profiteers *Civil society calls for equity, transparency, and accountability during public hearings*

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND—Limited [public hearings](#) are now in progress for the proposed WHO global accord on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response (pandemic treaty). In negotiation since February, the process is already raising significant concerns, not least of which is who is allowed to offer substantive input and how will the treaty negotiation harmonize with the WHO review of the existing vehicle for addressing health emergencies, including pandemics. More than 200 civil society organizations (CSOs), health experts, and lawmakers are appealing to the International Negotiating Body Members (INB) and negotiators to shift course without delay.

At stake, civil society claims, is history repeating itself. Millions of deaths. Staggering health care costs. Livelihoods decimated. Widespread and severe illness. All thanks in large part to a “lack of international cooperation” and failure to fully recognize “the inherent injustice and structural inequities exacerbated by such crises”—crises that cannot be properly addressed by a purely biomedical approach, if future pandemics are to be avoided.

In [their letter](#), signatories are calling for the INB to inoculate the process against the “undue influence of the private sector and its powerful lobbyists.” Commercial interests and their proxies have [prevented publicly-funded vaccines from reaching millions](#) in need. They’ve [used the pandemic crisis to advance the privatization of healthcare](#), often with support from international development circles. And the [tobacco industry’s ownership of pharmaceutical corporations](#) is already providing a potential back door for perpetrators of another global health crisis to influence how pandemics are governed into the future. Yet WHO leadership insists on embracing a [“multistakeholder model”](#) in this treaty making process, inviting such conflicted commercial interests to sit at the table as “relevant stakeholders.”

“We are at the treaty’s first fork in the road. Will negotiators go down a path that allows big, vested interests to steer the process? Or will Member States’ delegates establish the primacy of human rights and indispensable safeguards against corporate political interference?” said Ashka Naik, research director for Corporate Accountability.

Both the WHO and the INB claim to be looking to the precedents of the WHO’s only other treaty as guidepost, the breakthrough Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). Not only does the FCTC have [strict provisions and guidelines on conflicts of interest](#), its negotiations have long involved broad and consistent civil society participation. This despite the [tobacco industry’s attempts to ensure otherwise in the early 2000’s](#). As the letter notes, “the limited transparency on the INB process so far is reason for serious concern.” Details for the public hearings, including times, procedures, and other key issues, were only made available last week. Those who are selected for “substantive” oral testimony have no more than two minutes to speak, while written, “open-ended” submissions are limited to no more than 250-words.

“Public hearings are welcome, but we fear they may amount to little more than a checked box. Broad, substantive civil society participation needs to be an enduring and a vital part of the process, not a one-off,” said Nicoletta Dentico, co-chair of the Geneva Global Health Hub (G2H2). “What’s more, the elements of the treaty must be selected based on a coherent *ex-ante* vision of what countries realistically need to prevent and prepare for future pandemics, rather than a lengthy shopping list of elements hastily provided in a few weeks”.

Another primary concern raised in the CSO letter is around the international community’s ongoing neglect of the “interconnected dynamics” contributing to pandemics. For example, “unsustainable food production and livestock breeding, wildlife trading, resource intensive lifestyles and consumption systems” cause and exacerbate global pandemics. The very model for providing health care is similarly fundamental to the treaty’s aspirations.

“Discussing the strategy for the prevention and preparedness for future pandemics entails, among many other radical decisions in the economic governance of the world, a clear uncompromising option for universal and public health systems in countries,” said Giulia Grillo, Italy’s former minister of health. “This is the only reliable barrier to safeguard a society when an outbreak emerges, and it must be supported financially, with no hesitation, for the public interest.”

These concerns are being raised at this week’s hearings. The World Health Assembly presents the next vital juncture for the nascent treaty in late May. Draft treaty language is anticipated in September.

###

Additional Resources

1. [Open CSO Letter on INB Process](#) (Mar 2022)
2. Report: [The politics of a WHO pandemic treaty in a disenchanted world](#) (Nov 2021)
3. Press Release: [Civil Society Report Raises Concerns About Proposed Pandemic Treaty](#) (Nov 2021)
4. [History of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control](#) (2009)

About Geneva Global Health Hub (G2H2)

The Geneva Global Health Hub is a membership-based association created in Geneva in 2016 to provide a space and enable civil society to meet, share knowledge and create initiatives to advocate for more democratic global health governance. The values that guide and drive its work are belief in democracy with equity in diversity; dignity; accountability and transparency; and ethics and justice.

Website: g2h2.org Twitter: [@G2H2_Geneva](https://twitter.com/G2H2_Geneva)

About Corporate Accountability

Corporate Accountability is a more than 40-year-old membership organization, whose advocacy, research, and official status with the World Health Organization helped facilitate development of a global code of marketing of breast-milk substitutes, recommendations on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children, and the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. With staff, board of directors, members, and partners spanning the globe, Corporate Accountability is driven to build a world rooted in justice where corporations answer to people, not the other way around.

Website: corporateaccountability.org Twitter: @StopCorpAbuse

For media enquiries please contact

Neha Gupta, communications@g2h2.org Nick Guroff NGuroff@corporateaccountability.org