G2H2 Advocacy Platform
In the Post-COVID World: Standing up for Health Equity and Social Justice

> *"Moments of crisis such as the one we are living through present us with challenges and opportunities to remake the world. But change will not come on its own. We have to take action to make the world healthier and better."* (G2H2 advocacy platform 2021-2022)

There were great hopes at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic that the adverse impact of the new coronavirus could inspire far-reaching steps by governments and international institutions. The lockdown, requisition of hospitals, and the repurposing of manufacture for health production were some of the actions taken by governments which showed that, with the necessary political will, they can put public health before private wealth, and ensure that people's social protection come before the geo-political and economic interests of the more powerful countries.

As the World Health Organization declares the end of COVID-19 as a global health emergency, it is clear to civil society organisations in the health sector that we must redouble the struggle for health equity and social justice in the post-COVID-19 world. During COVID-19, governments, supra-national bodies like the European Union and International Financial Institutions suspended some of the neoliberal policies and practices that had undermined health rights for decades. Now they have taken significant steps to reintroduce these policies which failed us all and contributed to the severity of the pandemic. While world leaders indulge on the narrative of sustainable development and commit to negotiations for a pandemic treaty that is meant to prevent a similar global catastrophe in the world, the militarization of global policy-making is coupled with new rounds of prescriptions involving austerity and state withdrawal, and post-adjustment policies continue to promote public-private blended health systems. After the pandemic, health is once again the sector at the centre of this double dynamic: removing the state and letting the financial market in.

In 2021, the Geneva Global Health Hub reaffirmed its commitment to "building an independent civil society voice for global health that places people's rights at the centre", with the approval of its first Advocacy Platform.

The events since then have confirmed the correctness of this position and the need to reinforce our commitment. Despite the World Health Organization's "COVID-19 Resolution" in 2020, we witnessed the abysmally shameful phenomenon of "vaccine apartheid" when vaccines developed with substantial public funds, were unevenly rolled out at the end of 2021, reflecting a "racialized health inequity" throughout the pandemic and the "direct link between Covid-19 global inequality and systemic racial injustice in the world" (UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism). Cuts in government funding were introduced in 134 countries, and it is projected that austerity measures will be the norm in 143 countries by the end of 2023, affecting 85% of the global population.

Meanwhile, the same world leaders have pumped upwards of US$2.24 trillion on wars, annually. The Covid binge allowed corporations to get richer, with 40 new pharma billionaires emerging by the middle of 2022. Wealth and power accumulation makes policies and funding for "Health for All" extremely difficult to achieve.

There is no way the world can arise from the ashes of the COVID-19 pandemic if this trajectory of our collective reality is not reversed.

A vibrant global health civil society movement has an important role to play in this regard, joining forces with constituencies that are committed to climate justice, food rights, tax and financial justice, digital rights. Now more than ever, public interest civil society organisations must stand up for the kind of world we want and deserve. And there is no better time than now, to take this collective voice.

75 years ago, the right to health emerged as the first constitutionalised and binding right. The preamble of the World Health Organization's constitution declared the vision of the global society in which the highest attainable standard of health as a fundamental right of every human being could be pursued. The world is so far away still, and there is a long journey ahead, towards realising this lofty aim. And we must be bold to advocate for steps to be taken to turn the tide of social and economic forces that have put the interests of a few over the need of achieving health for all. G2H2 has taken steps in this direction, in line with the mandate of the 2021-2022 Advocacy Platform. These included the publication of two critical reports on the pandemic treaty discourse, which brought issues that were taboos in the global health circles into the discourse, such as the importance of financial justice for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

Our advocacy work will continue to include telling uncomfortable truths about why health for all has been a mirage and will continue to be so, unless drastic steps are taken by governments and the international development community, including financial institutions. And we will also propose concrete solutions that promote the right to health, global solidarity, and a more equitable world.

We will put in perspective the centrality of health equity and social justice in the polycrisis sweeping across the world. World leaders have aptly described the climate crisis as a health crisis. The global economic crisis and geopolitical conflicts equally have dire impacts on achieving the aim of universal health care, beyond reducing it to "universal health coverage" both directly and indirectly. Spiralling inflation is pushing food and nutrition required for positive health outcomes out of the reach of people. And the neoliberal responses of international financial institutions and governments, such fiscal consolidation and raising interest rates drive us further away from achieving UHC. The impact of violent conflicts can also not be overemphasised. Wars are displacing millions of people and destroying health facilities. And many governments fail to respect the right to health of refugees and migrants, undermining our collective humanity. A wave of culture wars is also sweeping across the world. Conservative ideas and forces are rolling back or putting at risk sexual and reproductive rights. Sexaul and gender minorities face onslaught against their democratic rights and very lives, jeopardising their health and wellbeing.

We cannot overemphasise the inseparability of planetary health and human health. But the surveillance-focused and security-biased dominant slant of the "One Health" approach does nothing to address the environmental, socio-economic, financial and political dynamics underpinning health inequities between and within countries and regions. The world needs a One Health vision that boldly confronts the power dynamics and economic structure that promote continued metabolic rupture of humankind from the rest of nature, leaving us more and more vulnerable to zoonosis, extreme climate events and pandemics.

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A situation where millions die because of lack of access to much needed medicines and vaccinations while a handful of individuals and corporations accumulate extreme wealth is unacceptable. Corporations profiting from the pandemic has become natural. This must be combated in shaping the discourse, advocacy and practice of health equity. G2H2 commits itself to being at the heart of this exceedingly important task for the civil society movement in international health.

Thus, we will foster joint work and collaboration with and between civil society organisations, communities and governments with a focus on the following:

- **The climate crisis and planetary health:** G2H2 will affirm the socio-ecological vision of health as the lens through which prevention acquires new priority in any health discourse, across the disease spectrum, and not be limited to policing based on a biomedical agenda that favours powerful economic actors.

- **Universal public health care:** G2H2 will insist that governments have a legal responsibility to care for the life and dignity of all people in their societies, and to cooperate to adopt and implement health enabling policies within and beyond national boundaries, including the macroeconomic policies required to properly fund universal health care.

- **Economic and political determinants of health:** G2H2 will promote a new, fair international economic order that is required for the realisation of Health for All. G2H2 advocacy for fundamental reform of the global financial architecture to enable much needed fiscal space for low and middle-income countries, will include debt cancellation and tackling illicit financial flows as urgent global health priorities. G2H2 will thus link advocacy for public health financing with intersectoral calls for financial sovereignty, redistribution, and solidarity.

- **Decolonisation of global health:** G2H2 will tackle issues of power, dependency and racism in multilateral institutions, development fora and processes.

- **Corporate capture:** G2H2 will expose how the private sector, including national and global public private partnerships undermines international and national institutions, fora and processes, and will explore what is to be done, including fostering collaboration with relevant regional organisations in this regard.

- **Pandemics and pandemic prevention:** G2H2 will call on governments to address root causes of pandemics instead of fighting symptoms. We will advocate for concrete safeguards to be put in place for the prevention of airborne diseases and blood-borne diseases over, and for the primacy of the application of the precautionary principle in prevention and control of infection, over questionable behavioural approaches that tend to promote the blaming of patients, health and care workers and communities.

- **Health employment and decent work for health workers:** G2H2 will advocate for health workers for all as a necessity for achieving the goal of health for all. Health workers were the heroes of the COVID-19 pandemic. They deserve more than applause. We will campaign for decent work, including labour and trade union rights for all health workers, and fair and ethical health worker migration, to curb the crisis of health workforce shortages, particularly in the Global South.

- **Global governance, multilateralism and the right to health:** G2H2 will assess and expose failures and shortcomings of the current multilateral system and its institutions, as related to their impact on the attainment of the right to health,

including WHO, international financial institutions, and Global Public-Private Partnerships (GPPs) in health governance.

- **Civil society governance:** G2H2 will promote the critical role of civil society actors in challenging inordinate and unaccountable power in global health and also promote self-reflection, social accountability and unalloyed commitment to good governance of civil society organisations on platforms and initiatives involving civic engagement in global health.

To this end, members of G2H2 may propose to:

- **Initiate studies, and organise activities as G2H2** to advocate on these issues;

- **Encourage, initiate and support activities of members** with the aim of assessing and taking forward the issues raised;

- **Participate in advocacy initiatives with allies and other groups**, based on an explicit mandate given by G2H2 members;

- **Implement and monitor a G2H2 communication strategy** which promotes global peace and social justice as part of its advocacy mandate;

- **Reach out** to other CSO constituencies.

This G2H2 Advocacy Platform was approved by the Annual General Assembly (AGM) on 20 June 2023, and will guide G2H2's advocacy, subject to revision by subsequent sessions of the AGM, as may be deemed necessary.