

Overview

The Pre-WHA Civil Society Forum ("Equity, Justice and Health") was co-organized by the People's Health Movement, Third World Network and the World Council of Churches in order to "share concerns and recommend actions that civil society views as being of critical importance for advances in global Health and health equity."

Attendees

The event, attended by approximately 40 people, consisted entirely of like-minded groups. These organizations are almost all either controlled by their government or in control of their government. They are not independent.

- The pervading view in the room is that the economic crisis and swine flu outbreak are providing opportunities to push a more socialized agenda at the World Health Assembly (WHA).
- The Committee on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) is seen as a small victory and attendees would like to see it leveraged into an ongoing intergovernmental working group.

Highlights and Key quotes

Global Coordinator, People's Health Movement – Hani Seral (Egypt)

"Thailand has a loud voice during the WHA and can give examples for many countries to follow, like compulsory licensing. Great compulsory licensing examples that other countries can learn from and is a great way to break the monopolies of the pharmaceutical companies. We call on the WHO to promote the use of the flexibilities."

"World Bank and IMF are big competitors to WHO. It needs to assert itself as the real coordinator of public health."

Presidente do Centro Brasileiro de Estudos da Saúde (CEBES) – Sonia Fleury (Brazil)

Speaking in place of Brazil's WHO delegate

"We all came from communist parties, which were banned, and created an acceptable formal face. We helped keep people in the country with communist backgrounds who desired health reform"

"We have been successful in demobilization of social movements. They don't get a broad view and they are fragmented. This institutionalization helps to keep from politicizing this discussion."

"The opportunity of this flu should be used to compulsory license to avoid these global health issues."

Civil Society's Call to the WHO

Civil society organizations and social movements issued a call to the WHO, Member States, Social Movements and Civil Society Organizations at the 62nd World Health Assembly. The document focused on the issues of Primary Health Care and Social Determinants. It shared concerns and recommended actions specific to health financing, trade & health and governance.

The first item in the 'Call' urges member states to "privilege the interests of people and public health, over commercial and corporate interests."

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A summary of the key discussion

Thailand “NGO” discussing CSDH and the role of civil society

(seated at the head table next to the Thai WHO Delegate)

Thai Health Promotion Foundation was established by the Thai government with USD \$19 Million from sin tax. (*alcohol & tobacco*)

Rest of the presentation was cheerleading for the Thai government: touting their 2008 National Health Assembly as a social innovation.

Thai WHO delegate

“Thailand is important because of the collaboration between the Thai government and civil society”

“Economic crisis is an example of the importance of social health. This is a political situation opportunity. Businesses have to honor the decisions of government.”

President of CEBES – Sonia Fleury (Brazil)

CEBES gathered academics pre-democracy in Brazil. Group slogan was “Health is democracy. Democracy is health”

“We formulated the design of our universal health system 30 years ago and it was enacted into law 20 years ago”

“The head of the federal Health Ministry is a former president of our organization and many other members occupy high state and federal positions in health care.”

“We had all our interests put into law during the constitution debates: National public system, private health care regulated by the state, decentralized system to allow state and municipal control. This is the model for federalism in Brazil not just for the health-care sectors”

“Legal framework is a problem affecting the health sector. People go to court because they are not having the health care they want and the judge always gives them what they ask for because they have the right. This is a market for the drug producers. This is a big problem with this legal framework.”

“Supreme court called a public discussion last week, they are putting the consumer right up instead of the collective right. People with HIV are saying they would not have survived without the courts.”

Call to the WHO

The ‘Call’ from Civil Society also urges that Member States:

- Increase capacities of the public sector in health care provision, health research and health-related industry (viz. pharmaceutical manufacturing), and strengthen national public health programs;
- Avoid commercialization of health care and IP protection for health products, that unnecessarily increase the cost of health services without offsetting public health benefits;
- Incorporate full TRIPS flexibilities and avoid TRIPS-plus measures in national laws and in trade agreements, while working towards the re-negotiation of the TRIPS agreement to limit monopoly and promote access;
- Promote local manufacturing capacity for medicines, and strengthen public health systems’ ability to promote medicines access through use of price controls, rational drug use and use of generics;
- Ensure just/equitable licensing of IP produced by public funded research, and examine alternative mechanisms to IP to promote innovations

The WHO is urged to:

- Be proactive in preventing TRIPS “plus” measures from being promoted
- Ensure the exclusion of pharmaceutical companies in all forms of participation, including covert or overt funding, in norm setting activities

The Call from Civil Society is online at:
www.phmovement.org/cms/en/node/2016

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A summary of the key discussion (continued)

Global Coordinator, People's Health Movement – Hani Seral (Egypt)

“At the EB meeting in January, PHM had a representative in the meeting by having the Third World Network represent us and distribute our statement to the members”

“The SDH is not exactly what we wanted but it is not very bad. We need to do lots more lobbying to make the resolution better.”

People Health Movement – Dr. Amit Sengupta (India)

Analysis on the final report of the CSDH:

“Major factor that hinders the attainment of this goal is the continuing neoliberal paradigm of development led by and reflecting the narrow interests of multinational corporations and finance capital.”

“If the recommendations had matched the diagnosis it would have been prophetic with the global economic collapse. Civil society must see this as not 'just another report'. We think this is an opportunity for civil society to build upon. It could be a major move forward. “

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