Statement to the 74th Session of the World Health Assembly, 24 May to 1 June 2021

on agenda item 13.3 Expanding access to effective treatments for cancer and rare and orphan diseases, including medicines, vaccines, medical devices, diagnostics, assistive products, cell- and gene-based therapies and other health technologies; and improving the transparency of markets for medicines, vaccines, and other health products

Thank you, Chair. Medicus Mundi International would like to take this opportunity to address agenda item 13.3. This statement is supported by the People's Health Movement.

We are concerned about the disparities in access to biotherapeutics. In too many countries patients lack access to the newest and most effective treatments. They are the victims of a biomedical innovation system that incentivises the profit-driven commercialisation of knowledge generated with public funding. The extent of public funding for R&D is well documented for mRNA vaccine technologies, be it in their application for cancer or COVID-19. We urge WHO to address the lack of technology transfer and sharing of know-how for biologic drugs and cell therapies to allow for greater biosimilar production in the global south.

Increasing access to biotherapeutics will benefit from greater transparency regarding financing and costs. Although the pharmaceutical industry claims that the monopoly rights provided by patents and the subsequent artificially high prices are necessary to recover investments in R&D, much of the high-risk research into cancer, rare, and orphan diseases is funded by governments and charities. Yet within the current profit driven R&D model, the public receives little or no rewards for public contributions to early research, as this investment does not translate into fair pricing and accessibility of new health technologies. Through transparency in R&D cost we can avoid that the public pays twice for health innovation. Additionally, more can be done to take into account non-monetary public contributions such as voluntary participation in clinical trials, which should be reflected in access.

Transparency in actual costs of R&D and manufacturing facilitates affordable pricing and fair access. We urge member states to urgently implement, with WHO's support, the transparency resolution which provides for tying transparency to regulatory approval of health technologies, and emphasises that R&D costs should be made public to ensure accountability.

Medicus Mundi International, Murbacherstrasse 34, 4013 Basel, Switzerland
NGO in official relations with WHO - Sharing know-how and joining forces towards Health for All
Phone +41 61 383 18 11 - office@medicusmundi.org - www.medicusmundi.org