

Statement to the 74th Session of the World Health Assembly, 24 May to 1 June 2021
on agenda item 19. The public health implications of implementation of the Nagoya Protocol

Thank you, Chair. Medicus Mundi International would like to take this opportunity to address agenda item 19. This statement is supported by the People's Health Movement.

The Convention of Biological Diversity and its Nagoya Protocol recognizes States' sovereign right over their biological resources and that access to resources is subject to fair and equitable sharing of its benefits.

We reiterate concerns regarding the findings of EB148/21, as highlighted in our statement during the EB. We are especially concerned by the inaccuracies in WHO's report with respect to influenza virus sharing.

We are extremely concerned with the current BioHub initiative led by the Secretariat. It is designed outside the decision-making process of the EB and WHA. Such a process is unlikely to deliver concrete benefit-sharing, especially in terms of timely equitable access to medical products. The current pandemic has exacerbated inequities and this should not be furthered by bypassing the governing bodies of WHO.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of a successful Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Framework, which was discussed and negotiated among WHO members. These member state-led negotiations resulted in firm and binding benefit-sharing commitments from the pharmaceutical industry. The framework puts in place a fair and transparent structure mandated by WHO governing bodies.

The BioHub initiative in its present form risks contributing to the perpetuation of inequities and risks disincentivizing the sharing of potentially pandemic pathogens. It needs to be consistent with the principles of the CBD and Nagoya Protocol.

We are concerned that sharing of sequences is not being reciprocated by sharing of medical products developed based on the shared sequences. We urge WHO to address this inequity.

We stress that member states must lead the process of setting up a framework for access and benefit sharing of potential pandemic pathogens and seasonal flu viruses.