

Statement to the 74th Session of the World Health Assembly, 24 May to 1 June 2021
on agenda item 26.2 WHO transformation and 26.3 WHO reform

Thank you, Chair. Medicus Mundi International would like to take this opportunity to address agenda item 26.2 and 26.3. This statement is supported by the People's Health Movement.

It is now 10 years since the WHO reform agenda was launched and almost 4 years since the start of the WHO transformation agenda. It is time for reflection and course correction.

A key rationale behind the WHO reform was to facilitate sustainable and predictable financing for WHO. When the reform was initiated, the share of sustainable financing through assessed funds was above 22% of the budget. After 10 years of reform, the share of sustainable financing has come down to 17% of the budget, and another MS working group on sustainable financing was just set up by the EB.

In the name of governance reform, the space for formal participation of Member States and Non-state actors has been further reduced. We are concerned that the introduction of constituency statements will stifle the voice of public-interest organisations. On the other hand, FENSA has failed to fence-off conflicts of interest and is instead an excuse to sideline norms and standards that ensure arm's length relations between WHO and NSAs with links to industry and other possible conflicts of interest.

Ideas that were rejected by MS, such as a "World Health Forum", are regularly brought back as part of governance reform. We are seriously concerned about WHO accepting money from industry through other entities. This is amplified when the concerned entity carries the name of WHO. There is currently no mechanism to ensure accountability of the WHO Foundation to Member States.

In short, the reform and transformation agenda of WHO has added more challenges to the credibility, integrity and independence of WHO. We call upon MS to urgently address these issues rather than leaving it to a set of technocrats and management consulting firms.