Statement of the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations on WHO Reform

Agenda Item (h) WHO reform – implications for the Regional Office for Europe

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On behalf of 117 National Medical Students' Associations, we laud the efforts of the Secretariat in advancing WHO reform. We highlight our appreciation for the efforts to improve WHO's engagement with non-state actors, particularly within the youth sector, and we believe that the Regional Offices have a key role to play in this process.

Meaningful youth participation has increasingly emerged as vital to effective global health governance. Member States, through the WHA Resolution 64.28 (2.11), specifically request the Director General "to promote the participation and empowerment of young people as key stakeholders in health development, including in the work of the Organization." Moreover, the same resolution urges "Member States to support the role of young people, with special attention to youth organizations, with a view to facilitating young people's empowerment and participation in influencing their environment and shaping public policy."

We believe this is particularly relevant to the Regional Offices, where the link to the local reality is stronger and therefore, are more capable of adapting to specific needs and strengths. Furthermore, we believe the Regional Office for Europe can be an outstanding example to follow, given that the Region it serves has already a culture of youth inclusion and some institutions even encourage youth participation in policy-making and decision-making. As such, we would like to invite the Regional Committee for Europe and its Member States to join us and ensure the specific recognition of youth organizations in the overarching principles for WHO's engagement with non-State actors at all levels – national, regional, and global.

As a youth organization, we have been working to forge coalitions with other health professions and student organizations in an effort to promote greater youth participation. Prior to the 66th World Health Assembly last May, we convened more than forty young leaders from around the world and across disciplines to craft a unified youth voice on key WHA agenda items affecting youth. We hope that Member States, the Secretariat and the Regional Offices will provide support for this kind of initiative and create formal spaces for youth engagement. Moreover, we challenge Member States to ensure the presence and active participation of young people in their delegations and initiatives, as well as build meaningful collaborations with youth at the local and national level to ensure issues directly related to youth receive appropriate consideration.

Youth voice is critical to the future of global health and WHO. Children and young people, comprising more than 50% of the world's population, will inherit the global health care system and shape the world's health. Furthermore, youth face barriers to accessing health care services and are vulnerable to a unique set of health risks. Youth organizations are poised to address these barriers. Most importantly, youth bring a unique and creative perspective.

In addition to ensuring greater youth participation within WHO processes, we encourage Member States to continue to make swift progress to clarify policies in WHO with respect to managing conflicts of interest. A case-by-case approach to this issue is insufficient and threatens to undermine the integrity of WHO. We believe that financial or commercial interests must be fully disclosed and managed in decision-making processes. We specifically encourage the development of a clear policy including procedures and criteria for involvement of non-governmental organizations with conflicts of interest.

As a voice of young people, we urge Member States to ensure that the WHO that emerges from the reform process is the WHO we want. A WHO that meaningfully engages with youth organizations and is safeguarded from conflicts of interest - this is the WHO we want.

IFMSA at a Glance
Founded in 1951, the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) is the world's oldest and largest independent organization representing medical students from around the world. IFMSA currently maintains 117 National Member Organizations from more than 100 countries that are the home to about 1.3 million medical students. IFMSA is recognized as an international nongovernmental organization by the United Nations and the World Health Organization and is a proud partner of various international bodies such as the World Medical Association. At the European level, IFMSA has also institutional relations with the Council of Europe, the European Union Health Policy Forum, the European Alcohol and Health Forum (EAHF), the Association for Medical Education in Europe, the European Youth Forum (YFJ), among others.

Created to make a positive impact on the world, IFMSA has inspired generations of medical students to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to take on current and emerging challenges in medicine and global health. Annually, the IFMSA network provides opportunities to medical students through its two general assemblies, five regional meetings, around 10,000 international exchange programs, hundreds of national and international projects, and dozens of international campaigns on issues ranging from climate change to global health equity.

For more information, http://www.ifmsa.org/.