Meeting:
Seventieth World Health Assembly

Agenda Item:
23.3 Engagement with non-State actors

Statement:
Global Health Council supports WHO's efforts to develop guidance that clarifies engagement with non-state actors. As part of that process, we welcome ongoing dialogue with civil society that considers both risk and rewards associated with partnerships. We also encourage WHO to consult other UN agencies that more effectively engage civil society.

Guidance should address the lack of clarity in FENSA around the categories and definitions of NSAs, as well as nuances that affect non-profit membership organizations including academia and industry. In the absence of formal guidance, staff and Member States should not be overly cautious or punitive in their interpretation. Doing so diminishes motivation for civil society to partner with WHO, and causes non-state actors to be inappropriately influenced in their strategic relationships and activities.

Our members report a lack of consistency across WHO in applying the new framework and advising non-state actors. So we appreciated the opportunity to offer input on recently-proposed parameters, and welcome additional requests for feedback throughout implementation. Ultimately, we hope staff and Member States view civil society as vehicles for assistance, not interference. Non-state actors help fill outstanding gaps, solve persistent problems, and foster constructive debate across a spectrum of issues.

WHO needs multiple stakeholders to engage in productive ways, in light of increasingly limited resources for its work. It will take all of us to be successful in our mutual goal of health for all. And civil society makes critical contributions to WHO’s mandate, through research, programs or services, and advocacy.

Ideally, many actors can be brought to the table with a fundamental level of trust versus suspicion, and an openness to accepting expressed motivations for engagement. We will not agree on everything, and that is healthy, so long as everyone is focused on what is most important: the people we serve worldwide.