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WHO's Engagement with Non-State Actors – 25 October 2013

The Global Social Observatory commends WHO Director-General Margaret Chan for the consultation process and search for a better understanding of the many views on how the WHO might evolve in its rules of engagement with nonstate actors.

The mission of the GSO is to facilitate dialogue and disseminate information on social issues in order to encourage all interested stakeholders to engage in a broadened search for solutions and in finding a common ground for working together. The GSO starts with this basic principle in encouraging the WHO to facilitate a space for dialogue and collaboration with the many different nonstate actors with an interest in global health issues.

The GSO would like to share its insights on two key points. First, all actors, whether they are states or nonstate actors, should abide by certain underlying principles. Of course, the GSO understands that an important distinction between the WHO and the GSO is that the GSO provides a neutral forum that is separate from the intergovernmental processes of the WHO and other UN agencies and that intergovernmental processes need to retain their intergovernmental nature. Even as an informal neutral forum, however, the GSO seeks to engage participants who embrace certain shared values and principles, and these should operate as underlying principles for all forms of dialogue with nonstate actors, including

- A shared commitment to promoting an integrative and holistic approach to sustainable development;
- A shared respect for basic human rights, cultural diversity and gender equality; and
- A commitment to engage in areas of common interest

A second point is that the GSO would like to highlight the suggestion by Professor Thomas Zeltner for bridge building between and among different nonstate actors. The GSO is a unique forum that encourages this kind of cross-stakeholder dialogue, and the GSO believes it is useful for all stakeholders to listen and learn from others in an interactive format. To facilitate this, the GSO supports the very three changes to the management of engagement that are proposed in the WHO discussion paper:

- A due diligence approach to examining all interests;
- A risk-based approach to identifying conflicts of interest; and
- Increasing transparency

The GSO has worked in several settings where the concern about undue influence of powerful groups has been raised but where the key message is that they are indeed there in the world around us and that transparency, due diligence and risk management are the preferred ways to counter the possibilities of undue influence.

As the WHO explores the possibilities for differentiation among the different categories of nonstate actors, the GSO encourages that the WHO do so within the context of applying the overarching principles listed in the discussion paper to all categories of nonstate actors and to incorporate the approaches on due diligence and risk management and with a particular emphasis on the benefits of transparency for all of these categories.