

Statement delivered by Third World Network (TWN)

World Health Organization (WHO)

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TWN expresses its gratitude to the WHO Director General and the Honourable President of Brazil for their open letter cautioning world leaders about the price of being unready. With COVID-19 claiming up to 20 million lives and causing over US dollar 13 trillion in economic losses, the joint letter reminded us that every month this annex remains unfinished, leaves the world less prepared than it could be, and the people less safe than they deserve to be.

Likewise, IGWG must take note that every PABS contract not concluded at the time of access to PABS resources leaves the world less prepared than it should be. Recent outbreaks of Ebola and Hantavirus expose important gaps in our preparedness. Several actors accessed BDBV (Bundibugyo ebolavirus) information for vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics (VTDs) evaluation and development, yet remain with no corresponding benefit-sharing obligations. Scientists had little practical alternative but to rely on databases that provide little support to ABS regime and the right to science and health of their fellow citizens.

The objective of IGWG is to establish a PABS system that genuinely strengthens pandemic preparedness. The design of such a system cannot be based on an extractive model where access to samples and sequence comes first, while benefit sharing is negotiated later bilaterally between the WHO Secretariat and pharmaceutical companies.

Nor can PABS rely on anonymous access to sequence information. Such approaches undermine legal certainty, weaken preparedness, and increase biosecurity risk.

The work of the IGWG is not to develop a compromise for the sake of compromise. Article 12 already provides the framework for operationalizing a safe, accountable and transparent system of the PABS system.

A meaningful progress towards this objective now requires developed countries coming down from their maximalist positions and adopting a positive and constructive outlook towards ABS laws and measures. The Third World Network thanks the Bureau, the Secretary, and Member States for their tireless efforts, especially smaller delegations, for enduring longer durations of negotiations in the interest of global public health.

Thank you.

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