

Agenda Item: 8.3 Addressing the global shortage of medicines and vaccines

Statement:

MMI would like to address agenda item 8.3. Our statement is supported by PHM.

We welcome the progress made in this area. However discussions on access that relate to IP barriers and barriers posed by high prices in monopoly situations are not clearly addressed. Addressing the global shortage of medicines and vaccines also requires a discussion on innovation and access to medicines.

Since the harmonisation of patent laws in 1995, the current monopoly-driven R&D system fails to prioritise public health needs. The lack of better norms and incentives for R&D causes the current imbalance in R&D priorities which leaves many people without treatment.

Several years of discussions at the WHO on Innovation, IP and Public Health have not resolved the current innovation and access crisis. We see an opposite trend: compromised access to medicines due to high prices no longer affects only developing countries, but increasingly patients in high income countries too.

Across countries the public sector already invests large sums in R&D. Yet without sufficient public health safeguards, the outcomes of such R&D are often largely garnered by the private sector. Member States have sufficient resources and capacity to implement novel R&D incentives and regulations. For example, granting end prizes to innovators (instead of patent monopolies) would enable generic production of medicines from the moment of discovery, and would therefore de-link the price of medicines from the cost of R&D.

Respecting its public health mandate, the WHO should lead and guide countries in implementing such new incentives and regulations to address current needs. The UN High Level Panel on Access to Medicines Report is an eminent opportunity for the WHO to re-invigorate and renew its work in this area. We urge the WHO and Member States to endorse the UNHLP Report and work for implementation of its recommendations.