Health: a human right or a commodity?

Workshop for journalists

Salle Eckenstein, Institut universitaire d'études du développement (IUED)
20 rue Rothschild, 1202 Geneva
Tuesday 25th September 9h00-12h30 followed by a buffet

"It is my aspiration that health will finally be seen not as a blessing to be wished for, but as a human right to be fought for." Kofi Annan

A child dies from an easy to cure diarrhoea. A patient succumbs to AIDS because effective drugs were too expensive. Is that bad luck? Or is it a human rights violation as serious as a political dissident being tortured in prison? Is the right to health more costly than the right to vote? Access to health is now recognized as a human right, but it is often considered a "second class" right when compared to civil and political rights – a right that needs financial means to be implemented.

Better access to health for everyone is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015. The obstacles are numerous. It is often said that "the main cause of ill health is poverty". The right to health can be linked to the environment, the social system, working conditions, rules governing the economy and business, intellectual property rights, governance, scientific research etc.

And let's not forget that in developing countries a majority of the population uses traditional medicine (eg. 85% of Africans) as their principal means of health protection. By tapping into this inherited medical knowledge along with western medicine, access to appropriate treatment within the overall contect of economic and cultural conditions in the developing world could be improved. An adequate recognition of traditional knowledge is a highly disputed issue, currently negotiated at the World Intellectual Property Organization.

How can we guarantee a right to health everywhere in the world? What should industrialised countries, the pharmaceutical industry, international and non-governmental organisations be doing? This crucial challenge for the life of billions of people both in the North and South still remains largely uncovered by the media. Our workshop gathers representatives of the main actors dealing with various aspects of access to health, including some of the hot issues of today.

The workshop is supported by *the* ***Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development***, and organised by the ***InfoSud*** press agency, and its online journal ***Human Rights Tribune***. This interactive debate is linked to the **Media21 Global Journalist Training Programme** run by InfoSud, in collaboration with the **Geneva Press Club**. Some presentations will be in English, others in French.

PROGRAMME

9. 00 – 10.30 Access to health for everyone: obstacles and opportunities

- *Welcome address*: Daniel Wermus, Director of InfoSud
- *The right to health and the challenges of its implementation*. Helena Nygren-Krug, Health and Human Rights Adviser, WHO
- *The pharmaceutical industry and the access to health : What is the outlook?* Prof Klaus Leisinger, CEO, Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development
- *Is globalisation good for the health of the poor?* Dr Jean-Daniel Rainhorn, professor in international health and humanitarian action, IUED/Geneva University.

10.30 – 10.50 Coffee

10.50 – 12.30 Workshop / Debate

- *The involvement of the health professionals* Dr. Slim Slama, Chief resident FMH Internal Medicine Department of Community, Medicine and Primary Care, University Hospitals, Geneva
- *The emergence of the pharmaceutical industry in the South*. Ram Etwareea, journalist, Le Temps, Geneva
- *Intellectual Property and access to medicines: What are the priorities?* Pierre Chirac, Campaign for Access to Essential Medicines. MSF/Doctors Without Borders,

12.30 – 14.00 Buffet Lunch

Interactive sessions

Similar to the panels at the Davos Forum, presentations will be kept short (5 to 7 minutes)
They will introduce new ideas, challenges and solutions. A concise « fact sheet » will provide essential information (background, documents, statistics etc). It is the exchange of ideas, dialogue and interaction between the participants and with the journalists that will make these sessions so valuable.

Participants

- Swiss journalists from the Geneva area
- Foreign correspondents based at the UN Palais des Nations
- Foreign journalists taking part in the training session during the Human Rights Council
- Right to health specialists

Languages : French, English. Simultaneous translation (English to French) will be provided

Operational Partners: Geneva Press club, World Health Organisation, Graduate Institute of Development Studies IUED, University Hospitals Geneva HUG, Médecins dans Frontières, Foundation for Traditional Health Approaches and Knowledge.

Registration (free) **required by Friday September 21**:
InfoSud, 9 rue du Valais, 1201 Genève tel 022 901 33 33, fax 022 901 33 30 info@infosud.org