



Official Newsletter of the Global Social Observatory
Geneva, Switzerland

Twelfth Issue – February 2017

GSO General Assembly

Notice: 2017 Annual GSO General Assembly, Thursday, 10h00 to 12h00, 11 May 2017. Please hold the date on your calendars, and let us know if you would like to join us – send an email to contact@gsogeneva.ch. We'll send you more information as the date approaches.

Introduction

We are committed to action and collaboration in response to the challenges we face today, alarming as they may be. We must stand up for what is right and to act accordingly. We believe in and respect the benefits that come from the interdependence of all people for a just society in every part of the world.

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GSO Priorities

With guidance from members and friends of the GSO, the GSO remains fully committed to providing a neutral platform for inclusive and mutually respectful dialogue and collaboration on global social issues. The GSO action plan operates in four priority areas - supporting (1) the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and (2) efforts to reduce inequality, with an emphasis on gender, along with (3) cross-cutting approaches to global health issues (with an emphasis on non-communicable diseases) and (4) building trust for multi-stakeholder collaboration through the prevention and management of conflicts of interest. In this newsletter, we share some updates of our activities in the first two priority areas. In anticipation of a broadened discussion about the future of multi-stakeholder collaboration at a special session of our next General Assembly on 11 May 2017, our involvement in the third and fourth priority areas will be tied to a special report that we will be sending to our readers separately.

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The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The GSO has been in the forefront of the growing campaign to move beyond silos and engage with all interested parties in an inclusive approach to 2030 Agenda. At the 2016 annual GSO General Assembly, participants updated a five-point action plan for the GSO role in the implementation of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Check the GSO website here for the complete action plan. Since then, the GSO has been welcoming the flowering of initiatives to support the implementation of the SDGs – along with the commitments in the Paris Climate Change Agreement. GSO representatives participated in many of the events associated with the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda at the September 2016 opening of the UN General Assembly, including the major summits on migrants and refugees and anti-microbial resistance, as well as significant side events on the new Global Strategy on Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health and on women's economic empowerment. Further, the GSO is supporting the efforts at coordination for International Geneva through the soon-to-be-launched SDG Hub and at supporting country-level implementation of multi-stakeholder platforms through the UN Development Group, led by UNDP. This, therefore, remains a centrepiece for GSO action.

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Reducing Inequality, with an emphasis on gender

Meanwhile, the GSO has focused most of its attention in the past six months on how we can contribute to reducing inequality in the world, with an emphasis on gender. We featured the issue at a special session of the 2016 annual General Assembly – an interactive dialogue on gender as an integrating dynamic for implementation of all seventeen of the SDGs. A full report of the special session is available on the GSO website. The session taught us a lot

about looking beyond gender-neutral policies to apply a gender lens to the impact of different policies and programmes, even where they may appear to be gender neutral, and adapting new technologies for innovative solutions while also tackling existing legal and cultural barriers to gender equality.

Since then, the GSO has convened a panel for the 2016 WTO Public Forum on 1 October 2016 in collaboration with Women@theTable on women's economic empowerment and trade. We are especially interested in the differential impact of trade policy on the basis of gender. Trade policies themselves don't necessarily discriminate on the basis of gender, but their impact can be indirectly discriminatory, as women occupy a large part of the informal economy in lower paid, lower skilled jobs that are displaced as trade and technology develops. And in some cases, the policies may even have a direct impact in areas like access to trade finance for women entrepreneurs or the differential treatment of technical skills for jobs and career advancement. We are a long way from gender being a natural part of trade negotiations, but a simple addendum to trade deals to gather disaggregated data on how and who trade policies impact would be a start.

Continuing with this theme, the GSO's Executive Director Katherine Hagen is moderating a panel on gender and trade at the WTO as part of the WTO's celebration of International Women's Day. This will be from 9h00 to 10h30 on Thursday, 8 March 2017 at the WTO. The panel features the gender-related work already being done in several of the departments at the WTO and at the International Trade Centre, as well as the perspectives of key ambassadors to the WTO. A special display in the WTO Atrium will also address the challenges and successes in the portrait of a working mother.

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Commentary on International Organizations and NGOs

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Readers will recall that the UN Human Rights Council in June 2016 voted to establish an independent expert on the rights relating to sexual orientation and gender identity and on the appointment of this independent expert in September 2016. This issue was a divisive one at the Human Rights Council itself, and challenges were also launched at the UN General Assembly by the African Group and supported by Saudi Arabia and the Russian Federation in New York. The challenges in committee and on the floor of the UN General Assembly were effectively defeated, but we do know that the tensions between supporters and opponents among the Member States of the Human Rights Council will likely continue to stir things up. And it now appears that the Trump Administration will also be pulling US support. The SOGI independent expert is Vitit Muntarbhorn, a remarkable professor emeritus from Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. His approach to SOGI encompasses five themes –to decriminalize, destigmatize, legally recognize, culturally include and express empathy for people living with SOGI concerns. Professor Muntarbhorn is planning to present some of his work during the 34th session of the Human Rights Council, meeting from 27 February to 24 March 2017.

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Refugees, Migrants and Global Compacts

The Director-General of the International Organization for Migration, William Swing has repeatedly argued that migration “is one of the greatest political challenges of our era” and that there is a “vacuum to be filled” by the IOM becoming a part of the UN system. The High-Level Summit on

Migrants and Refugees was held at the opening of the 70th session of the UN General Assembly on 19 September 2016. It was a timely setting for this to happen. Critics of the Summit lament the failure of the main outcome document (available here) to go beyond existing law for the protection of migrants and refugees. Language in the document was significantly “watered down” in key areas, such as third-country responsibility for refugees or detention of undocumented children. Although the document also stipulates the acceptance of the existing legal framework, it does set the stage for new policy.

The document contains a Political Declaration and two Annexes – one for refugees entitled “Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework” and one for migrants entitled “Towards a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration”. Both annexes call for the drafting of global compacts, but the procedure for the one on migration is more detailed than the procedure for the one on refugees. Both are to be drafted over the course of a two-year period. As one might expect, the global compact for refugees defers to UNHCR as the main UN agency to support the process, while the global compact for migrants gives this role to IOM. So we can see both of these Geneva-based agencies actively engaging in their respective tasks.

The aim is to achieve a consensus on commitments for action in time for another high-level summit in New York in September 2018. This includes two parallel global compacts on migrants and on refugees, with UNHCR on the lead for the first one (again, see the schedule for the latest briefing here) and with the UN working with IOM on the second. More information is currently available on the global compact involving migration. This process is co-facilitated by the UN ambassadors from Mexico (José Gomez Camacho) and Switzerland (Jürg Lauber) in New York but with over half of the events in 2017 planned for Geneva. See the latest document laying out the proposed modalities of the official negotiating process here. It includes an

information-gathering phase in 2017 with three events in Geneva on the human rights of migrants, environmental crises and labour migration, and three events in New York on sustainable development, governance and trafficking.

The resolution also makes specific reference to plans for “effective participation of all stakeholders”, including civil society, private sector, academic institutions, parliaments, local authorities, diaspora communities and migrant organizations. We hope to see more opportunities for actual participation, if only as observers. The IOM and UN Secretariats, by the way, are “co-delivering” the staff support for this intergovernmental process, with the IOM taking the lead on providing technical and policy expertise.

Meanwhile, there is also a Civil Society Action Committee that has been coordinating with NGOs in the consultation process. They issued a “New Deal for Refugees, Migrants and Societies” that gathered over 90 signatories by mid-August. In addition to the multi-NGO Committee on Migration, signatories include major groups like Amnesty International, Care International, Oxfam and Save the Children. See the New Deal here. The New Deal contains four action items – an immediately-adopted international plan to protect the safety and dignity of refugees, migrants and other displaced people; launching the two separate Global Compacts – one for “Responsibility-Sharing for Refugees” and the other for “Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration”, including a roadmap for this one; and another call for international action for social inclusion and against discrimination, racism and xenophobia.

We also note that the topic of labour migration is on the agenda of the International Labour Conference this year, meeting in Geneva on 5 to 17 June 2017. We also know that migration and refugee issues will be addressed by the Human Rights Council in all three of its regular sessions in March, June and September 2017. So there is plenty going on to counter the anti-immigration sentiments in the US

and among reactionary populist movements elsewhere.

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Momentum on Forced Labour and Child Labour

While we were at the opening of the UN General Assembly in September 2016, we also participated in the launching of a new “8.7 Alliance” (see the new website [here](#)) on the eradication of “forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and all forms of child labour” at a high-powered event in New York on 21 September 2016. The 8.7 Alliance is a full-blown coalition with ILO, UNICEF, UNODC and other UN agencies, plus governments, NGOs and foundations. The ILO is serving as the secretariat, and it has unofficially renamed its International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) as “IPEC +” to accommodate this expanded outreach. We were interested to see that the next (fourth) Global Conference on Child Labour, to be hosted by Argentina in November 2017, has been renamed the Global Conference on Child and Forced Labour.

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The Business and Human Rights Forum

We were quite active this past year at the 2016 annual Business and Human Rights Forum, which met from to 16 November 2016. This was the first of these annual forums to emphasize the positive aspects of how business can “lead and leverage” a respect for human rights, not only in their own business operations, but also throughout their global supply chains. This was further reinforced by the fact that the International Labour Organization (ILO) had adopted a new plan of action at its annual conference in June 2016 in support of a business role in promoting jobs and decent work through global supply chains. So the ILO was a more visible in the 2016 forum than usual, and many of the sessions linked human rights with workers’ rights, especially for a living wage and sustainable livelihoods.

In an [opening plenary speech](#), the creator of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights Professor John Ruggie spoke about the linkages between the Guiding Principles and the social dimensions of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Professor Ruggie described the respect for human rights as being “at the very core of the people part of sustainable development”. First, it describes a central business role for “helping to ensure that people are paid a living wage” throughout their supply chains – along with equal rights and opportunities, the right to organize and bargain collectively, and taking responsibility for their health and safety on the job wherever the work might be in the global supply chain. Second, he argued, this would also help “manage the growing threat that globalization itself faces from populist forces in industrialized countries”.

We also note, however, that there continue to be advocates of a more stringent and legally binding instrument for multinational enterprises at the global level than the Guiding Principles. The Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group set up by the Human Rights Council in 2014 to explore this option will be holding its third session on 23 to 27 October 2017 to discuss a first draft of such an instrument. A briefing on the Working Group will be presented during the 34th session of the Human Rights Council, which is meeting from 27 February to 24 March 2017. In addition, the sixth Business and Human Rights Forum will itself be addressing the theme of “access to remedies”, a potentially more confrontational theme than this year’s theme, on 27 to 29 November 2017.

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Selected Health Issues – Access to Medicines

Perhaps the most contentious health-related issue for 2017 is enshrined in the [report](#) of the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Access to Medicines (commissioned by S-G Ban Ki-moon and completed late last year). The report itself had a long list of recommendations, such as a binding

treaty on funding and prioritizing research and development for neglected diseases, convening a special open-ended meeting on access to medicines, and various approaches to delinking the cost of research and development to the price of medicines. Most of these recommendations have already been promoted by one or another advocacy group and several governments - most outspokenly this year by India. The key is that there is a growing outcry about the rising costs of medicines and other medical products, and increasingly so in the developed world as well as in the developing world.

While the WHO membership is divided on how to handle the High-Level Panel’s report, a consensus was reached during the WHO Executive Board meeting in January to include it on the agenda for the World Health Assembly in May 2017. The agenda item that had been labelled only “Global shortage of medicines” in the original provisional agenda has now been *expanded* to be “Global shortage and access to medicines”. WHO Director-General Margaret Chan described this broadened agenda as one that underlines access to medicines as a “very complex and multifactorial issue”. See the revised WHA agenda for May 2017 [here](#). We note, too, that the WTO TRIPS Council is debating the HLP report at its next meeting on 1 to 2 March, and the public will also be able to attend a side event on the report sponsored by the South Centre. See the Events calendar below.

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Selected Health Issues - Antimicrobial Resistance

Another emerging health issue is the emerging crisis on antimicrobial resistance. The 2016 annual collaborative symposium involving WIPO, WHO and WTO on health-related IP and trade issues was held on 25 October 2016. The topic this year was on *Antimicrobial Resistance: How to Foster Innovation, Access and Appropriate Use of Antibiotics?* The programme and video on demand are available on the WIPO website [here](#). The symposium also produced a number of informative ideas on changing

therapeutic practices and developing preventive strategies that are customized for the local circumstances where change has to happen. The issue was also covered by a summit at the UN in September and with a global action plan at the WHO. It is a serious concern that should be receiving more funding for developing new antibiotics than is currently the case.

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Leadership Changes of Interest to the GSO

The second term of the WHO Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan comes to an end on 30 June 2017. For the first time, a new election process is under way to choose a successor. By the end of September 2016, six candidates had been nominated by their respective governments. In the past, the Executive Board would have met in January to choose one among them to recommend to the World Health Assembly for its formal approval in May. This time, the Executive Board in January was mandated to recommend three candidates, and the World Health Assembly will decide in May which one to accept. The campaigning by the three candidates is now very active and includes a “moderated discussion” with the three candidates on 6 May 2017 at the Graduate Institute. The three candidates are Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus from Ethiopia, Dr. David Nabarro from the UK and Dr. Sania Nishtar from Pakistan. The event will be webcast. See more information under Forthcoming Events. We also encourage readers to check out their respective campaign websites, linked here by their names: [Dr. Tedros](#), [Dr. Nabarro](#) and [Dr. Nishtar](#).

The leadership of several other international organizations of interest are also in transition. Our friend Johanna Ralston has completed her second term at the World Heart Federation, but no replacement has yet been named. Another strong leader, Dr. Mark Dybul, has opted to leave as head of the Global Fund to fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Here, the process is a bit more closed a lot more rapid than it is at the WHO. On 20

February 2017, a nominating committee of the Global Fund’s Board announced three finalists, and the Board has only one week to select one by 27 February 2017. We understand that the finalists are Dr. Muhammad Ali Pate from Nigeria, Subhanu Saxena from Cipla, an Indian pharmaceutical company, and Helen Clark from New Zealand.

Other fairly recent leadership changes include the appointment of Ambassador Gerda Verburg from the Netherlands as Coordinator for the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement, Lawrence Haddad from the UK to head the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, Malaya Harper from Canada as the General Secretary for the World YWCA, and Thomas Cueni as the new Director General of the IFPMA. The IFAD Council has also just this past week elected Gilbert Foussoun Hougbo to succeed Kanayo F. Nwanze as President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Mr. Hougbo, a former Prime Minister of Togo, will leave his post as a DDG at the ILO in April to take up his new post at IFAD. We also hear that David Miliband is a front-running candidate to succeed Helen Clark at the UN Development Program and that David Beasley, a former Governor of South Carolina, has been given the nod by President Trump to replace Ertharin Cousin as the WFP Executive Director. Both changes are expected in April 2017.

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The Leading Environmental Issue for 2017: Oceans, Fisheries and SDG 14

Although most media attention in the environmental area has been directed the entry into force of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (and threats by President Trump to withdraw the US from the Treaty) we think that attention will shift in 2017 to another environmental interest in which we are deeply interested. This is the long-term viability of our oceans and related policies on fisheries preservation, which will be the focus of a major conference in 2017. SDG 14 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has raised awareness

about the importance of conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. We appreciated the high-level briefings in Geneva on the trade-related aspects of SDG 14 convened in January, by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and by the organizers of the forthcoming UN High-Level Oceans Conference to be held from 5 to 9 June 2017 in New York. UNCTAD is also hosting an Oceans Forum on the trade-related aspects of SDG 14 on 21 to 22 March. See more information on this Forum in our calendar below.

At the briefings, we heard that fish is traded in quantities that are three times the value of any other product in trade, and we also heard that over-fishing is an ever-growing challenge for both environmental and fairness of trade reasons. While these are the underlying reasons why many seafaring countries have effectively blocked negotiations to reduce fisheries subsidies at the WTO, one can argue that the issues have been elevated in global public discourse by their inclusion in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It so happens that SDG 14 is also one of the SDGs that will be given special attention this year at the UN High-Level Political Forum, which is meeting in New York in July. We look forward to the preparations leading up to both the Oceans Conference and the HLPF.

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Upcoming Events

International Events of Interest in Geneva (unless otherwise noted), June-July 2016

27 Feb -24 Mar HRC [34th Session of the Human Rights Council](#)

At the Human Rights Council there will be many panel discussions and side events, listed on a daily basis in the link above. Here are some highlights:

27 Feb High-Level Panel on the Contribution of Human Rights to Peacebuilding

2 Mar Panel on climate change

6 Mar Rights of the child all day

8 Mar Panel on access to medicines

9 Mar Panel on maternal mortality

1 Mar South Centre [Side Event on UN SG High-Level Panel on Access to Medicines](#)

6 Mar Global Health Centre [Political Leadership for Global Health](#)

7 Mar IOM [2017 International Dialogue on Migration](#)

9-23 Mar ILO [329th Session of the ILO Governing Body](#)

13-24 Mar UN [61st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women](#)

20-21 Mar [Africa CEO Forum](#)

21-22 Mar UNCTAD [Oceans Forum on trade-related aspects of SDG 14](#)

28 Mar WIPO [Information Session on Geographic Indications](#)

6-7 Apr ILO [The Future of the Work We Want – A Global Dialogue](#)

24-28 Apr ILO [Employment and Working Conditions in the Health Services](#)

24-28 Apr UNCTAD [E-Commerce Week 2017: Towards Inclusive E-Commerce](#)

11-12 May ILO [International Conference on Jobs and Skills Mismatch](#)

22-31 May WHO [70th Session of the World Health Assembly](#)

5-9 Jun UN [Oceans Conference Implementation of SDG 14](#) (in NYC)

5-17 Jun ILO [106th International Labour Conference](#)

6-23 Jun HRC [35th Session of the Human Rights Council](#)

8-9 Jun WIPO [Seminar on IP and Traditional Knowledge](#)

12-16 Jun ITU [WSIS Forum on Information Societies for SDGs](#)

28-30 Jun [Global Forum on Migration and Development](#) (in Berlin)

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IV. Who We Are

The Global Social Observatory (GSO) is an international organization founded in the Canton of Geneva, Switzerland in April 2004. The mission of the GSO is to initiate dialogue on social issues in order to encourage leaders to engage in a broadened search for solutions and policy coherence. This service is based on a participatory process in a neutral space that brings all interested parties together across national boundaries to identify solutions and policies that are coherent. These solutions can then contribute to policy-making at the governmental and intergovernmental levels. Visit our [website](#) for regular news and project updates.

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