



**Press Release**  
**For immediate release**

**IAPO calls on WHO to bring patient groups to the centre of discussions  
on public health, innovation and intellectual property**

Geneva, Switzerland 7 November 2007 - The International Alliance of Patient's Organizations (IAPO) yesterday held an educational seminar in Geneva which highlighted the critical importance of including patients in the ongoing WHO discussions on Public Health, Innovation and Intellectual Property. The seminar coincided with the WHO Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG) meeting to finalise a global strategy on this same subject.

*"Our discussions revealed a genuine fear from patient groups that this issue has become polarised, and indeed the IGWG process has gone off-track" said Durhane Wong-Rieger, IAPO Board Member, who chaired the seminar, "The WHO is focusing on two main barriers to patients receiving effective treatments – lack of innovative therapies and lack of access to therapies that have been developed. IAPO agrees with this, but feels strongly that it does not go far enough. We need to focus on the lack of access to healthcare overall, which needs to be addressed if this WHO initiative is to have an impact on patients' lives".*

IAPO is concerned that the debate around these issues has become polarised by different stakeholders as developed versus developing economies or, more versus less stringent intellectual property regimes. This has the potential to create conflict between patients with chronic illnesses and patients with infectious diseases when, in fact, what should operate to the benefit of all patients, is access to good healthcare, including safe and effective treatments.

These different interests have neglected the perspective of the key stakeholder: "*patients*" with whom there has been no meaningful engagement in this process. We urge the WHO and all stakeholders to show leadership and take meaningful action to ensure that patients and patient groups are given a central role in future discussions. We also recommend that member countries should consult with patients' organizations and patients and include their opinions in the development and implementation of this strategy.

As a result of the IAPO seminar, patients and patient representatives are more aware of the issues. The group recognised absolutely that there are no simple solutions and believe that for any solution to be appropriate and successful, patients and the organizations that represent them – patients' organizations - must be fully engaged. These groups are committed to return to their countries and contact their governments to request meaningful patient engagement.



Patient groups from a number of countries including Zimbabwe, India, Israel, China and the US provided the seminar with varied experiences from across the globe. Whilst it is clear that all countries face different types of issues, a common theme emerged that whilst healthcare systems may be different between countries, access to healthcare is an issue in all, without exception. This is influenced by access to basic infrastructure as well as access to healthcare facilities. Education of patients is critical to ensuring that treatments are administered appropriately, but also to empower patients to have a say in their own health and treatment.

*"There are many issues that affect access to healthcare, all of which are critical in the innovation and intellectual property discussions", commented Jo Harkness, Chief Executive Officer of IAPO. "Without accountability of governments and health authorities to address barriers, and implement actions in a transparent manner, the Global Strategy will not become the concrete and practical plan that is needed to bring about better care for patients everywhere."*

Access to treatments is important, as is innovation to continue to develop new treatments. However, they are intrinsically intertwined with each other – without access, innovation generates no benefit; without innovation, access leads to limited outcomes. Likewise, they are part of the broader discussion on access to healthcare, which needs to be addressed urgently and in cohesion with the Global Strategy on Public Health, Innovation and Intellectual Property. IAPO calls on the WHO to raise this critical issue to the forefront of the discussions with significant engagement with patient groups on an international and national level from this point onwards.

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**Note to Editors:**

**About IAPO:** IAPO is the only global alliance representing patients of all nationalities across all disease areas and promoting patient-centred healthcare worldwide. Our members are patients' organizations working at the local, national, regional and international levels to represent and support patients, their families and carers. IAPO's has 200 members which span over 40 countries and 50 disease areas and through membership represents an estimated 365 million patients worldwide.

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