

#2023 TB HLM Affected Communities and Civil Society Coordination Hub Statement: Political Declaration on TB Adopted by Member States at the United Nations High-Level Meeting on TB



Civil society and affected communities cheered and chanted #YesWeCanEndTB from Conference Room 1 at the United Nations in New York City this morning when the Political Declaration (PD) on the Fight Against Tuberculosis (TB) was adopted with no objections. If member states follow through on their commitments, it will put the world on track to ending TB by 2030 and result in saving up to 45 million lives between now and 2027.

Because of the great advocacy efforts of many within the TB community, the declaration came a long way from humble beginnings in May. We now have specific, measurable and time bound targets to find, diagnose, and treat people with TB with the latest WHO recommended tools, as well as time bound and specific targets for funding the TB response and R&D.

A particularly big win for the community is the commitment "to strengthen financial and social protections for people affected by TB". Critically, this would alleviate the health and non-health related financial burden of TB experienced by affected people and their families. UN Member states agreed to ensure that by 2027 "100 percent of people with tuberculosis have access to a health and social benefits package so they do not have to endure financial hardship because of their illness". The community is also proud that this is the first political declaration on health that explicitly recognizes the human right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress. While the declaration could have been much stronger than it is and ultimately did not incorporate all key asks from TB stakeholders it will be an important reference for accountability.

However, despite supportive language, none of our substantive key asks related to ensuring all national TB responses are equitable, inclusive, gender-sensitive, rights-based and people-centred were secured. There are no specific commitments to action around costed community, rights and gender (CRG) action plans, stigma reduction plans, or strengthening national networks of people affected by TB in the declaration. Also upsetting is the fact that there are no explicit commitments to ensure public funding for research and development comes tied with access conditionalities. We all saw and lived through the consequences of citizen dollars not working for citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic, when predominantly publicly funded diagnostics, vaccines and treatments were ultimately not affordable or equitably accessible.

While the PD adopted today is a tool that grassroots advocates can and will put to use to drive action and accountability at national levels, the fight continues and we will remain engaged and untied to push for greater ambition, accountability and impact.

Hear from and amplify the reactions of some members of the #2023TBHLM Affected Communities and Civil Society Coordination Hub Leadership Group:

Quotes

The political declaration is one of the first to plainly acknowledge that science and the ability to access and fully enjoy its benefits is a fundamental human right. Winning this recognition of the right to science is something to celebrate. But the declaration has put forward this right without clearly committing to its fulfilment. Language on technology transfer, data sharing, funding for research, and access conditions on publicly funded R&D could have been stronger. We got the rhetoric but not all of the substance.

Mike Frick, Co-Director of the TB Program - Treatment Action Group

I'm encouraged that affected communities, civil society and addressing stigma are mentioned in the political declaration. What is more important to me is how this gets translated at the country level. Having something in the political declaration doesn't mean it will get implemented so we need to work at the ground level to ensure that leaders are held accountable to deliver on their commitments. I look forward to seeing the realisation of this political commitment at the country level to ensure equitable access and reduce suffering towards ending TB by 2030.

Blessi Kumar, CEO of the Global TB Advocates Network

The political declaration that we received as a result of the UN HLM on TB is a small but step towards strengthening the fight against TB from the standpoint of focusing on human needs and rights. It should be noted that this document became as such thanks to the continuous determined work of the global CSOs and communities in partnership with country missions. Today we have a good basis for advocating for the implementation of the recommendations defined by the provisions of the adopted political declaration. And learning from the lessons of 2023 will give us the springboard we need to work more effectively on the flight declaration of the next UN TB HLM.

Yuliia Kalancha, TB Europe Coalition Executive Director

Quotes

Tuberculosis is preventable, treatable, and curable – but it's hard to be cured of a disease if you're denied treatment. Today's declaration pledges to reach 45 million more people with the quality testing and treatment that is their right. This is a bold promise – and a doable one – but it won't come free. Communities and health workers are leading the way, and now we need global policy makers to bring the funding and plans to match.

Colin Smith, Global Policy Director - Results US

The UNHLM on ending TB this year is a great opportunity for the Government to show engagement in the fight against this old disease. We are only 7 years away from the 2030 - until now we didn't see a real commitment to meet the SDGs. Ending tuberculosis should start by reviewing the policies, fighting stigma, ensuring the vaccine and treating those who are affected by TB. We urge the Governments of the MENA region to ensure enough budgets to increase the response. Without that this event will be another lost opportunity.

Elie Aaraj - CEO of MENAHRA