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Statement submitted by Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

Promoting health and access to essential drugs are the key objectives of many of the international and national organizations that constitute the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences, a non-governmental organization created in 1949 by two intergovernmental organizations, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Since its inception, the Council, which is based in Geneva, has been an essential participant in global debates concerning some key areas of the medical sciences and the comparatively new field of bioethics. It is indeed no exaggeration to affirm that the Council is considered by medical and other health professionals to have made significant contributions to some fundamental aspects of health policy and to several medical specialties, notably pharmacology. The focus in recent decades has been within the fields of drug safety and bioethics. These areas have been strengthened and further work is ongoing and planned. The Council does not duplicate the work of intergovernmental organizations such as WHO. It is able to enlist the involvement of some of the world's leading experts, whether they are based in intergovernmental organizations, academia, regulatory agencies or the pharmaceutical industry.

The membership of the Council includes many international professional associations in the various medical specialties. In a sense, the Council is the voice of a major segment of the global community of medical professionals and biomedical scientists. It endeavours to avoid any overlap with the activities of intergovernmental organizations devoted to the advancement of health, such as WHO, with which it has very close relations. The outcome of the Council's activities aimed at assuring the safety of the pharmaceutical products that are essential to the health of individuals and populations in countries at all stages of development are regularly reported in publications and discussed at international and national meetings. The aims of these activities have been presented succinctly in the following terms: "To present objectively and persuasively the benefits that society as a whole derives from access to modern drugs and vaccines." Society must be assured that a responsible and committed effort is being made to minimize drug-induced injury and that the risks of such injury compare favourably to those accepted in other aspects of daily life. Most of the substantive achievements are the outcome of a series of carefully constituted working groups. It must be emphasized that these have no legal mandate to make binding decisions; thus, other bodies with the requisite mandate are relied upon to incorporate the Council's recommendations into a legislative or regulatory framework.

In the field of bioethics, the Council has made important contributions, notably through the *International Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research Involving Human Subjects*, last issued in 2002 (and currently under revision), and the corresponding *International Ethical Guidelines for Epidemiological Studies*, last issued in 2009.

For many years, starting in 1984, the Council conducted another major programme, entitled "Health policy, ethics and human values: an international dialogue". The topics covered included contemporary issues in reproductive health and human genetics and the perspectives of different religious and cultural traditions on key issues of health policy.