

21st September 2016**Open letter re: Hosting Union World Conferences on Lung Health in High Burden Countries**

Dear Civil Society Colleagues,

Thank you for your 24 August 2016 letter regarding selection criteria for hosting the annual Union World Conference on Lung Health. As your letter lays out, the World Conference is a critical platform for mobilising action and political will against TB and other lung diseases. The conference is also a critical platform for sharing the latest science on TB and lung health—contributed from researchers working in every region of the world—and for clinicians, care-givers, policy-makers, and affected community members alike.

We fully agree that the location of the conference is a very important factor in its success and its impact, and we also would like to convene the conference in more high-burden, low-income countries. However, we do not support the idea that the best way of accomplishing that aim is to predetermine which countries we will consider as conference hosts. The most effective way of convening more World Conferences in high-burden countries is to receive higher numbers of viable host bids from cities within high-burden countries.

Please understand that the World Conference is not an event that The Union “takes” to any given location, as your letter states. The conference location each year is decided through an open bidding process. In other words, the conference location is determined through expressed demand from potential hosts. The bid document, which provides transparent guidance for potential conference hosts, is a public document you can access here: http://www.theunion.org/vacancies/rfp/body/TheUnion_World-Conference-Bid-Document_Jan2016-1.pdf.

All countries are eligible to bid to host the World Conference, and The Union receives bids from a diverse group of countries each year, including low-income and high-TB-burden countries. China, Indonesia and Turkey have bid for the conference in recent years, for example. Once bids are submitted, after a deliberative process through which we assess the quality of submitted bids, The Union’s Board of Directors, including board members from civil society, selects the bid that is most responsive to the conference’s needs.

A range of factors necessarily goes into accepting a bid. To administer the conference, The Union requires a substantial financial commitment from host countries/cities. This financial commitment is essential to The Union’s capacity to convene the conference as well as to provide free civil society registrations and speaker scholarships. In addition to this financial commitment, convening the conference requires strong buy-in from the host government at both national and city levels, a convention centre that meets our requirements (we conduct thorough site visits of each bid finalist), plus political, logistical and security considerations, in addition to flexible entry visa processes. (See the bid document for the full list of considerations that factor into bid selection.)

It is therefore important for us to have the flexibility to choose the highest-quality and most responsive bid in any given year without pre-determining which bids we eliminate or refuse to consider at the outset. It is also important for countries/cities submitting bids to be confident that their bid will be reviewed on its merits in relation to other bids submitted in a given year.

While the World Conference is predominantly a TB conference, please keep in mind that The Union’s mission focuses on a range of lung health issues. The Union is also a membership organisation, and our members play a diverse range of roles within the field of public health. So while one consideration for choosing World Conference host cities includes a current initiative or proven historical role in the global fight against TB—including its role in scientific advancement—we also consider other factors, such as the host country’s and city’s roles in tobacco control/enforcement of smoke-free policies, and air quality in the host city. In order to successfully and sustainably convene the World Conference, we currently need to maintain the flexibility to select bids whereby a country’s

incidence of TB and other lung diseases is a key factor—but not the over-riding factor—we use in the selection process.

While the World Conference is The Union’s largest and most high-profile conference, we also convene annual regional conferences that are regularly held in low-income and high-burden countries, and which strive to achieve local and regional impact. Each year, The Union’s membership organises conferences in the different regions. In recent years, regional conferences have been held in Nepal, Cairo, Bangladesh and Rwanda, to name but a few. These regional conferences are significant gatherings in themselves, plus they have hosted important meetings convened by key stakeholders including the Stop TB Partnership, WHO and the Global TB Caucus.

We also want to acknowledge the fact that while 80% of the world’s incident TB burden exists within high-burden countries, every country is impacted by TB. TB is a global challenge, and even many high-income countries have geographic areas or communities where TB rates are on par with rates seen within high-TB-burden countries. As a global organisation, we want to continue to communicate that TB is an important issue for every country, and every country has a stake in working to end TB.

That said, we would very much like to receive more conference bids from high-TB-burden countries. Last year’s Cape Town conference was a critical moment for mobilising action against TB and lung disease, and it was one of The Union’s most successful conferences to date. We fully acknowledge the value and impact of convening additional World Conferences in high-TB-burden countries.

We welcome your support in that. Where you have contacts in high-TB-burden countries, please share the conference bid document with them and urge them to submit a bid. If you have cities in mind where you think we should reach out to directly solicit a bid, please let us know. As you can see from the attached document, in recent years, large numbers of World Conference participants have come from India, Nigeria, China, Kenya, Indonesia and Malaysia. Please feel free to reach out directly to The Union’s Global Director for Conferences and Summits, Emily Blitz, at ebnitz@theunion.org.

We appreciate your input and your organised participation in the World Conference, and we hope to continue our dialogue to make the conference as successful and as impactful as possible.

Sincerely,



José Luis Castro
Executive Director