

19 December 2022

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General
The World Health Organization
Geneva, Switzerland

Dear Director-General / Dr Tedros,

We, the Whistleblowing International Network, Transparency International, Transparency International Italy, Government Accountability Project and GlobaLeaks are writing to express our ongoing serious concern at the lack of implementation of due process at the World Health Organisation (WHO) in its handling of WHO whistleblower Dr Francesco Zambon. We refer you to our previous correspondence of May 2021 in relation to Dr Zambon's case.

As the lead researcher of the WHO publication "An unprecedented challenge: Italy's first response to COVID-19", Dr Zambon reported his concern about inappropriate pressure he received from the then Assistant Director-General, Dr Ranieri Guerra, in an effort to block the report and its findings from being published. Dr Zambon reported this misconduct to the Ethics Office and to his regional manager in line with WHO policies and procedures. To date, Dr Zambon has not received a satisfactory response to his reported concerns and due to the failure to protect him, Dr Zambon suffered retaliation and such a serious deterioration in his working conditions, that he was forced to resign. An administrative process has since been initiated to review the WHO management of his case.

Our first letter to you in May 2021 was followed by an [open letter](#), sent to the World Health Assembly - signed and supported by more than 40 anti-corruption and civil society organizations worldwide - urging the President of the Assembly and its members to ensure proper accountability and transparency, by seeking a commitment to a fair review of Dr Zambon's case.

Over the last 19 months, we have noted with increasing alarm that Dr Zambon's case has not yet been properly addressed, that the WHO is failing to comply with the clear and relevant rules of procedure, and there has not yet been any response to the request for review of Dr Zambon's complaints of retaliation. This is especially egregious given the seriousness of the issues he raised about the conduct of a senior employee.

We have been informed that the Global Board of Appeal (GBA) reviewed Dr Zambon's request to appeal and that the GBA forwarded its report regarding the case to you on April 20, 2022. According to WHO policy, you, as the Director-General, had 60 days to transmit the response to interested parties.

Since then, 180 days have passed, and there has been no response. This delay not only violates due process rules, it also demonstrates a failure to prioritize public interest whistleblowing.

The failure of WHO to properly manage a case that raised matters of such serious global concern of which received significant media attention significantly risks undermining public trust and confidence in the WHO and its capacity to hold itself as an ethical and just organisation, as should be expected of a Specialized Agency of the United Nations.

These ongoing procedural irregularities and the lack of a proper response from WHO leadership to protect whistleblowers, has wider consequences than in this individual case. We are deeply saddened that Dr Zambon joins a [long line of whistleblowers who have been poorly treated](#) at the UN and its agencies. WHO staff, towards whom you in your capacity as Director-General have primary responsibility, deserve better.

Our organizations are therefore urging you once again to take immediate and appropriate steps to ensure Dr Zambon's case is properly handled, and to expedite the much-delayed response in this case to the relevant parties as a matter of urgency. Should there be any further delays, we will consider reporting the irregularities in Dr Zambon's case directly to the UN Secretary General.

All whistleblowers should be treated fairly and should be supported to report public interest information. Our organisations will continue to closely monitor these cases and to advocate increased transparency and accountability at the United Nations and its agencies in dealing with whistleblowers and protecting their rights.

Yours sincerely,

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Chief Executive Officer, Transparency International

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