



Remarks

by

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President of the 68th Session of the United Nations

General Assembly

High-level Meeting of the General Assembly

**on the comprehensive review and assessment of the progress achieved in
the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases**

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Distinguished Ministers and Heads of Delegation,
Excellencies,
Under-Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General,
Director-General of the World Health Organization,
Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme,
Professor Tezer Kutluk,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

I am pleased to welcome you to this High-level meeting on the comprehensive review and assessment of the progress achieved in the prevention and control of non-communicable disease. This review takes place against the stark recognition that NCDs are now recognised by the WHO as the largest single cause of death and disability worldwide, responsible for some 36 million deaths, or 63% of a total 57 million in 2008. Further, by 2020, the number of NCD induced deaths is expected to grow to 44 million per annum. Simply put, NCDs are key determinants of human health and therefore represent a significant threat to human wellbeing and our sustainable development.

Over the next two days, you will be turning your attention to this major development challenge of the twenty-first century. At the same time, we begin this meeting optimistically, buoyed by a successful informal interactive hearing with non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector and academia, which took place exactly three weeks ago. Similarly, today's broad participation and interest in the topic bodes very well for the prospects of preventing and controlling NCDs.

Excellencies,

We are three years into the implementation of the 2011 Political Declaration on NCDs. During this time, much has been achieved at the international level. Specifically, I refer to four positive developments, namely:

- 1) the endorsement by the World Health Assembly in May 2013 of a Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2013-2020;
- 2) the adoption of a comprehensive global monitoring framework, which includes nine (9) voluntary global targets and twenty-five (25) indicators for NCDs to be achieved by 2025;
- 3) the establishment in July 2013 of the UN Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of NCDs; and
- 4) the establishment of a Global Coordination Mechanism on NCDs.

I commend the World Health Organization for its completion of these important global assignments, as was mandated in the Political Declaration. Yet regrettably, and despite the increase of national multisectoral plans and NCD units in many developing countries, a significant number of developing countries are struggling to move from commitment to action. It must be conceded however, that this is not the result of lack of political will. Rather, many developing countries don't have the resources – both technical and financial – to undertake effective multisectoral action and responses needed to address the significant health and socioeconomic impacts of NCDs.

The lack of resources and uneven progress are dismaying in light of the many burdens NCDs place on individuals, families, communities, and in countries, especially in the developing world, where some 80% of global deaths from NCDs occur. The increasing incidence and impact of NCDs are of particular concern as we seek to reorder the global sustainable development agenda and prioritise issues that most constrain development within the post-2015 agenda. It is also to be noted that every year more than fourteen (14) million people between the ages of 30 and 70 die prematurely from NCDs in developing countries; in fact despite rising life expectancy globally, a quarter of the deaths from NCDs take place in people under sixty (60) years of age. The reality we face and the one

we need to address is that developing countries have the greatest vulnerability and the least resilience in preventing and controlling NCDs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The rapid increase in unhealthy lifestyles such as tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and harmful use of alcohol are affecting the poorest people in the poorest countries. The health and economic burdens of NCDs have severely undermined development gains in many developing countries, in particular low-and middle-income countries. The high incidence of NCDs and resultant morbidity and mortality in the Pacific and Caribbean regions is very troubling, since as many as twenty-five per cent (25%) of the populations of both regions suffer from one or more NCD. It should also be remembered that the countries of these regions have very small populations and those in their most productive years, who should be making the greatest contribution to national development, are the very ones now being struck down by these diseases. As we continue our efforts to build a healthier and more sustainable world, we must remain aware of and address the very real risk that NCDs pose to sustainable human development.

Our efforts must also include children and adolescents, as well as persons over the age of 70, who are affected by NCDs in various ways. The World Health Organization reports that in 2010 the number of overweight children under the age of five was estimated to be over forty-two (42) million, with close to thirty-five (35) million living in developing countries. The tragedy of the high incidence of NCDs is not only the level of morbidity and mortality they cause, but the fact that they often can be prevented.

This raises one of the issues that has not been fully addressed in the Rio+20 and post-2015 development debates, that of lifestyle and sustainable consumption and production, which must be part of any discussion and approach in reversing the incidence and impact of NCDs.

Distinguished Delegates,

In 2011, Heads of State and Government undertook a tremendous commitment in the history of global health and development by raising awareness of the growing incidence of NCDs. Yet, as we wait for the seeds of this commitment to bear fruit, the burden of disease has grown in a world already struggling with new and emerging challenges. I therefore urge you to join me in expressing the sense of urgency that is now required to scale up and transform these commitments into action particularly at the national level where the fight against the NCDs must be won.

As I noted in my statement at the informal interactive hearing on NCDs three weeks ago, ‘it takes a village’ to prevent and control NCDs. Broader commitment and engagement by all relevant stakeholders is key. However, it is critical to provide sustainable financing and technical support to build and strengthen the capacity of health systems and interventions, improve data collection in countries that lack such capacity, as well as build knowledge and awareness programmes and strong primary health care systems that emphasise prevention.

During the informal interactive hearing we learnt that there is currently approximately thirty-one (31) billion dollars in development assistance dedicated to health, but only three-hundred and seventy-seven (377) million dollars of the entire sum is directed at NCDs. While we can explore partnerships and cooperation, such as North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, we must also integrate NCDs into bilateral and international development cooperation, national development agendas and prevention strategies. I am pleased to note that tomorrow’s round table discussions will address the issues of partnerships and cooperation, and multisectoral and whole-of-government responses.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good human health is simultaneously a contributor to and outcome of human development and the reduction of global deaths and disability from NCDs is pivotal to

good human health and development. Over the next two days, I ask you to help set this meeting apart as an event that placed the world on the path to achieve communities free of the avoidable burden of NCDs. Let it be the beginning of a more robust and effective implementation of the Political Declaration, in concert with the Global Plan of Action on NCDs. And let it lead to better partnerships and cooperation, and more effective multisectoral and whole-of-society approaches and responses.

This meeting, and the policies and actions that will emanate from it, can and must be used to set the global family on a more healthy, development-oriented trajectory. Let us embrace and give effect to this objective.

Thank you.
