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ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review
Regional Ministerial Meeting for Western Asia on
“Addressing Noncommunicable Diseases and Injuries: Major Challenges to Sustainable
Development in the 21st century”

Closing Statement by the Assistant-Secretary-General
of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Mr. Thomas Stelzer

11 May, Doha, Qatar

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

After two days of productive discussions, I would like to renew my gratitude to our gracious host, the Government of Qatar, for its generosity and support in organizing this meeting. This is indeed a timely initiative, as it brings a fresh perspective to the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review.

We are grateful for the dedication and hard work of all those involved in the preparations and the excellent team work shown by all.

I would also like to recognize and warmly thank the moderators, panelists and participants for contributing and sharing their experiences and perspectives with us.

We have heard how tackling the challenge of noncommunicable diseases and injuries is vital to the achievement of not only the health-related development goals, but also the broader development agenda. This is an important message to convey to the ECOSOC's Annual Ministerial Review in July in Geneva.

You have shared replicable practices in the Western Asia Region and found ways to overcome outstanding challenges in addressing noncommunicable diseases and injuries. I see that at least six strong messages emerged from these discussions.

Firstly, NCDs pose tremendous challenges in this region and this is widely acknowledged. There are plans for action to address these challenges but there is a big implementation gap. Clearly, there is a need for action at the highest political level.

Secondly, the action has to permeate through all parts of the government. In short, a multi-sectoral approach is required for the implementation of these plans. Also, all segments of societies should be

engaged. Community based activities that involve civil society, the private sector and educators can lead a major breakthrough in this area.

Thirdly, effective implementation also needs high quality data and analysis. Region wide capacity building activities should be launched for the collection of high quality data.

Fourth, the media has a major role in raising awareness on lifestyle changes and how NCDs can impact the whole society. The media and private sector need to take the lead in promoting fundamental changes in dietary habits, selection of foods, exercise and physical activities.

The fifth key message is about preventing injuries and deaths from accidents. I must acknowledge that the data was also an eye opener for me. The loss of lives is avoidable and injuries are preventable. There should be better planning and strict enforcement of rules for traffic safety.

Finally, the most important message is that NCDs and issues of road safety have to become an integral part of the overall development planning process. These should not be afterthoughts or by products. A “government of the whole” approach leading to a “society as a whole” action is required to improve and save the lives of millions in this region and around the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to reiterate the significance of this regional meeting to ensure that priority issues you have identified garner the attention they deserve at the Council's deliberations in Geneva. After examining the challenges of improving the care of noncommunicable diseases and injuries in Western Asia and hearing your experiences and knowledge, I believe we have a better understanding of how to overcome them. These discussions have certainly conveyed effective recommendations to accelerate progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The dialogue we have initiated here should carry on beyond this meeting, as part of our efforts to achieve the agreed development goals. We should not rest until that objective has been fully realized.

Thank you very much.