



# health

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## **MINISTER OF HEALTH – SOUTH AFRICA WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY, (WHA 70) - 22 MAY 2017**

President of the Assembly  
The Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan  
Fellow Ministers and Heads of Delegation  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

South Africa would like to join the rest of the world in condemning in the strongest terms possible the attacks that took place in Manchester last night. We pledge our solidarity with the British people in this regard. Our heartfelt condolences go to the people of the United Kingdom government and the families of the victims.

Prof Veronica Skvortsova, I wish to congratulate you on your appointment as the President of the 70th Session of the World Health Assembly.

I would also like to thank Dr Margaret Chan for her address. She has taken us through an overview of the work of WHO in the last year and as outgoing Director General, she has given an impressive overview of the achievements and challenges experienced during her tenure as DG over the last 10 years as reflected in review entitled "Healthier, Safer Fairer: the ten year journey 2007 - 2017". As we have come to expect, she has reflected in a most objective manner - taking full accountability for the challenges experienced. Thank you Dr Chan for your passion, compassion and dedication to global public health and your support to countries in Africa in particular.

WHO and the world learned valuable lessons from the Ebola outbreak. WHO is better prepared today as a result. The Ebola outbreak illustrated anew the importance of strong health systems, including the need for health workers and surveillance. It also emphasized the importance of fully implementing the requirements of the International Health Regulations.

Dr Chan's review of her 10 year tenure as DG of the WHO highlights our achievements in a number of areas. Maternal and child mortality rates have fallen in most parts of the world and consequently life expectancy has increased. However, inequities still exist between and within countries. Dr Chan has been alive to these continuing inequities and hence has fully supported the inclusion of universal health coverage in the Sustainable Development Goals. She noted the following to this Assembly in 2012 (and I quote):

"Universal health coverage is the single most powerful concept that public health has to offer. Universal coverage is relevant to every person on this planet. It is a powerful equalizer that abolishes distinctions between the rich and the poor, the privileged and the marginalized, the young and the old, ethnic groups, and women and men. Universal health coverage is the best way to cement the gains made during the previous decade. It is the ultimate expression of fairness".

To realise universal health coverage as well as to meet the Sustainable Development Goals it is critical that we strengthen health systems, in particular, primary health care.

We fully agree with Dr Chan when she said “we cannot treat our way out of the many diseases we face”, this means that we must focus on preventing diseases and promoting health. In this regard we wish to argue strongly for the building of a cadre of community health workers especially in Africa. This does not represent low cost healthcare as some uninformed people tend to think, but an appropriate investment in human resources for health as noted in the report of the High Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth endorsed by the UN in September 2016. According to UNAIDS, Africa alone will benefit significantly from employing 2 million community health workers over the next ten years.

South Africa fully endorses the World Health Organisation’s role as the premier global health institution which must be supported and whose integrity must be protected at all cost, including as advised by Dr Chan in her address, in our dealing with non state actors, in particular the food, pharmaceutical, beverage, tobacco and alcohol industries.

In order to ensure that the legacy of Dr Chan’s tenure as Director-General is sustained, we must provide WHO with the necessary resources. In turn, the incoming Director-General must ensure that these resources are spent on issues that we prioritise and as efficiently as possible. The reform of the WHO must also ensure that the resources of the WHO must be aligned with the requirements to implement and attain the Sustainable Development Goals as well as ensure that the organisation is sufficiently aligned to respond to epidemic emergencies.

In conclusion, I wish to once again thank Dr Chan for her immense contribution to global health and wish her well in the next phase of her life.

I thank you!

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