

**Opening remarks****Joining Forces: Effective policy solutions for COVID-19 response****ECOSOC Informal Briefing****11 May 2020**

Madam President,

Madam Deputy Secretary-General,

Excellencies, dear colleagues and friends,

Good afternoon from Geneva, and thank you for the opportunity of speaking to you today.

It's incredible to think that just 19 weeks ago, we knew nothing of this virus.

In just a few short months, the virus has swept around the world, causing havoc to lives and livelihoods.

Almost 4 million cases of COVID-19 have now been reported to WHO, and tragically, we have lost almost 275,000 lives.

Although cases are declining in Western Europe, they are increasing in Eastern Europe, Africa, South-East Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Americas.

But within regions, and within countries, we see divergent trends.

That's why all countries need a tailored response.

Nonetheless, there are several common things all countries must do, which are outlined in WHO's Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan.

First, we call on all countries to mobilize all sectors and communities;

Second, to control sporadic cases and clusters by rapidly finding and isolating all cases;

Third, to suppress community transmission through infection prevention and control and physical distancing;

Fourth, to reduce mortality through appropriate care;

And fifth, to develop safe and effective vaccines and therapeutics.

Research and development are essential for curbing and ending the pandemic.

Since January, WHO has been working with thousands of researchers all over the world to accelerate and track vaccine development - from developing animal models to clinical trial designs, and everything in between.

We've also developed diagnostics that are being used all over the world;

And we're coordinating a global trial on the safety and efficacy of four therapeutics against COVID-19.

The world needs these tools, and it needs them fast.

Past experience has taught us that even when tools are available, they have not been equally available to all.

We cannot allow that to happen.

Last month, I joined President Emmanuel Macron, President Ursula von der Leyen and Melinda Gates to launch the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator, or the ACT Accelerator.

Last week, leaders from 40 countries came together to pledge 7.4 billion euros for research and development for vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics.

This was a powerful and inspiring demonstration of solidarity, not only of financial support, but of a common commitment to ensure all people enjoy access to all the tools to prevent, detect and treat COVID-19.

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The pandemic is teaching us many painful lessons.

One of them is about the importance of strong national and sub-national health systems as the foundation of global health security and universal health coverage.

Strong and resilient health systems are the best defence not only against outbreaks and pandemics, but also against the multiple health threats that people around the world face every day.

And yet, on current trends, more than 5 billion people will lack access to essential health services by 2030 – including the ability

to see a health worker, access to essential medicines, and running water in hospitals.

Gaps like these don't just undermine the health of individuals, families and communities; they also put global security and economic development at risk.

The world spends around US\$7.5 trillion on health each year – almost 10 percent of global GDP.

But the best investments are in promoting health and preventing disease at the primary health care level, which will save lives and save money. Prevention is not only better than cure, it's cheaper, and the smartest thing to do.

The COVID-19 pandemic will eventually recede, but there can be no going back to business as usual. We cannot continue to rush to fund panic but let preparedness go by the wayside.

As we work on responding to this pandemic, we must also work lay the foundations for a healthier, safer, fairer world.

Thank you.