

16 June 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss,
President of the 65th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Opening of the Informal Civil Society Interactive Hearing on
Non-Communicable Diseases**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Just over a year ago, the General Assembly decided to convene a high-level meeting on non-communicable diseases. Nearly two-thirds of global deaths each year are due to NCDs, such as cancers, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases.

These diseases are a problem for all countries, and in all countries, it is for the poorest that access to prevention and treatment of NCDs and to healthcare provision is the most difficult. We would be failing if we did not act on this knowledge.

The decision to convene the high-level meeting was an acknowledgement by the General Assembly that the prevalence of the NCDs around the globe is such that it warrants a concerted global response. Furthermore, that response needs to go well beyond the health sector as there are much broader economic and social drivers for these diseases.

This hearing represents a significant milestone in the preparations for the September high-level meeting on NCDs. Over the past eight months, a number of regional consultations, as well as the WHO Global Forum and a Ministerial Conference in Moscow in April, have been held to inform the preparations.

As well as contribution to the preparation of the high-level meeting, today's hearing is also an important opportunity to identify key challenges and opportunities for addressing NCDs prevention and control. In this sense, the impact of the hearing goes beyond September's high-level meeting: it provides a basis for further strengthening our commitment to work together to address challenges and seize opportunities.

As we have learnt in our collective response to other health and development issues, success will depend critically on the ability of governments, the private sector and civil society to form alliances and partnerships to address effectively NCDs. No one actor is able to harness the resources necessary or address the complex range of factors that are driving the progression of these diseases. We must work together, and we must find ways to do so more effectively.

An important challenge that the global community faces is how to build these partnerships and to respond effectively at a time of financial constraint and at a time when there is still much work to do on other global health issues.

Let me be clear: NCD prevention and control is not competing with other development and health priorities, and it is important to understand that addressing NCDs is contributing to improving health conditions and development in general.

I made similar remarks at the high-Level meeting HIV/AIDS last week. As with the response to HIV/AIDS, it is essential that we integrate global action on NCDs with other health and development programs. There are obvious synergies to be had in addressing poverty and other health factors and in improving health systems, in particular primary care. Issues such as gender equality, climate change and food security are equally relevant.

I am convening this hearing at the request of Member States, thus reflecting how much they value the role of the groups present today. I know that the representatives of Member States that are here today are keenly interested in the issues and will be listening carefully to the discussion.

I am convinced that the stakeholders participating in this hearing – nongovernmental organizations, civil society organizations, academia and the private sector – are all essential to an effective response to counter the global progression of NCDs.

The timing of this interactive hearing is ideal, as Member States will shortly start their informal consultations on the outcome of the high-level meeting.

Today's discussion will directly inform the work of the Co-facilitators, Her Excellency Ambassador Sylvie Lucas and His Excellency Ambassador Raymond Wolfe, who are leading the preparation of the draft outcome document and assisting me with the subsequent negotiations. I take this opportunity to thank them for their engagement in the preparatory process of the high level meeting.

I want also to thank you for accepting my invitation to attend today's hearing. Your participation is a testament to the level of commitment and interest that there is in this important topic, and it bodes well for future global action to prevent and control NCDs.

I wish to thank the Civil Society Taskforce for its important role in advising on the preparations for this hearing. I also wish to thank the WHO for its leadership and support during the preparations for the high-level meeting.

I wish you a very stimulating and constructive interactive hearing.