

19 September 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,  
President of the 66<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Opening of the High-level Meeting on the Prevention and  
Control of Non-communicable Diseases**

Heads of State and Government, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

All over the world, men and women are dying premature deaths. All over the world, men and women are dying preventable deaths. And all over the world, health care systems are overburdened and economic growth is curtailed because of the loss of healthy workers.

Let there be no doubt that non-communicable diseases have reached epidemic proportions. Non-communicable diseases are the biggest cause of death worldwide. More than 36 million people die annually from non-communicable diseases, making up 63% of global deaths. And these deaths could largely have been prevented.

The impact of this loss, this tragedy, goes beyond individuals, beyond families. Non-communicable diseases are altering demographics. They are stunting development. And they are impacting economic growth.

Excellencies, Mr. Secretary-General, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

This High-level Meeting represents a landmark in the global fight against non-communicable diseases. This is the second time in the history of the United Nations that the General Assembly is meeting at the level of Heads of State and Government to discuss an emerging health issue with a major socio-economic impact. This meeting is an historic opportunity to set a new global agenda, and to advance the protection of the world's vulnerable populations. Let us not forget that everyone has the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and that it is our responsibility to contribute to the full realization of this right.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the two distinguished co-facilitators, Her Excellency Ms. Sylvie Lucas, Permanent Representative of Luxembourg, and His Excellency Mr. Raymond Wolfe, Permanent Representative of Jamaica, for their efforts in leading the consultations on the modalities and the outcome document for this High-level Meeting. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, his Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Ms. Margaret Chan, and all of you here today for your efforts to bring greater understanding and better solutions to these complex issues. I would also like to mention, with appreciation, the contribution of Member States in bringing this important health and development problem to the attention of the General Assembly. The role of the CARICOM countries deserves special appreciation.

Heads of State and Government, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since 2000, when Member States at the World Health Assembly first committed to reducing the toll of premature mortality due to non-communicable diseases, there have been important developments in our understanding of the causes and prevention of non-communicable diseases. It has become unequivocally clear that “best buy” interventions that reduce the toll of NCD-related premature deaths are workable and affordable solutions. It is also evident that the most rapid improvements in public health are often realized from relatively inexpensive interventions that begin in childhood. And perhaps most significantly, it is now clear that, to move effectively to prevent and protect against non-communicable diseases, governments must adopt approaches that go beyond just the health sectors.

In some wealthy nations, the health impact of non-communicable diseases has been reduced by advocacy, community mobilization, health system organization, legislation and regulation. We have seen less whole-of-government approaches in developing countries and the experiences have been starkly different: premature deaths due to non-communicable diseases among women range as low as 6% in high-income countries and as high as 58% in low-income countries. Among the many tragic consequences of such inequality is the impact on fulfilling the MDGs.

Heads of State and Government, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, we meet to take the vision and road map emerging from over 10 years of coordinated efforts, and consolidate them to set a new global agenda that will drive forward the fight against non-communicable diseases. If you, the Member States so choose, this High-level Meeting will be a turning point: an opportunity for Heads of State and Government to make major advances by committing to set national targets to reduce premature deaths from non-communicable diseases, and to promote a whole-of-government approach at the national level to prevent and control non-communicable diseases.

And if such commitments are to have any impact, this High-level Meeting must address the widening disparities in capacities among countries to address non-communicable diseases. This requires thinking in terms of international cooperation. International cooperation plays a pivotal role in the eradication of poverty, as well as combating inequality at all levels, which is essential to create a more prosperous and sustainable future for all. The global community must work together to monitor, reduce exposure to risks, and strengthen health care for people with non-communicable diseases.

A paramount goal also must be to take steps for a strong, well coordinated, coherent and effective UN response to scale-up technical support for developing countries, under the leadership of the World Health Organization, to assist countries to incorporate non-communicable diseases explicitly in poverty-reduction strategies and relevant social and economic policies. We must also recognize the important role of civil society, including the private sector.

As part of your work during the next two days, I encourage you to share lessons learned on ways to strengthen national capacities and appropriate policies. I believe it will also become clear that financing of national initiatives remains a major impediment to achieve progress. And I encourage you to identify ways to foster international cooperation for years to come.

Heads of State and Government, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today you will adopt an outcome document that will shape the international agenda for future generations. Let this document reaffirm a vision that goes beyond health, that also reflects the impact non-communicable diseases have on development and our economies. And let it be a document that will galvanise action and guide our efforts for years to come.

My sincere thanks to you all in advance for your hard work and constructive debate. I wish you a productive high-level meeting.

Thank you.