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Opening remarks by H.E. Peter Thomson, Global Health Crises

Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization,
Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under Secretary-General, Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC),
Dr David Nabarro, Special Adviser of the Secretary General on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Climate Change,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to this timely briefing on Global Health Crises.

A little over one year ago, Heads of States and Heads of Government came together in New York to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Taken together with the Paris Climate Change Agreement, I describe the 2030 Agenda as our masterplan to allow humanity a sustainable way of life on Planet Earth.

As President of the General Assembly for the 71st session, I have committed to lead a universal push to achieve momentum on each of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals. I am confident that if we act with the level of urgency and conviction required, we will achieve those Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

There are of course a number of areas where universal achievement of the Goals is threatened.

A failure, for instance, to bend the curve on global warming and to prepare for the effects of climate change would be disastrous. An expansion of the heartbreaking conflicts we are witnessing in parts of the Middle East and beyond will affect sustainable peace everywhere. An exacerbation of inequalities within and among countries can only lead to social dissatisfaction and unrest. And, as evidenced by the recent Ebola and Zika virus outbreaks, global health crises are an ever-present threat.

Global health crises have impacts far beyond our health systems. They dramatically affect social and economic development and undermine hard-won development gains. They weaken social cohesion, threaten national and regional security; and directly impact the health and well-being of ordinary people.

Without doubt, global health emergencies are a direct concern for us all. They could represent a direct impediment to the achievement of the SDGs and thereby our common future.

By their very nature, they transcend national boundaries. Our ability to respond effectively to them depends on our readiness to advance coordinated international action, sustained political and financial commitments, and improved global health crises response capacity.

Such needs were highlighted at the High-Level Meeting on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) that was convened in the General Assembly in September.

The resulting Political Declaration highlighted the destruction that Anti-Microbial Resistance can potentially cause along with the need to work urgently on addressing the AMR challenge and other global health crises.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Often global health crises have a strong humanitarian dimension requiring multifaceted responses. Our response should balance immediate relief and rehabilitation with long-term development, especially in developing countries.

Such an approach will be critical to protecting lives, strengthening health systems, and fostering sustainable development.

It is very appropriate therefore that today, we will hear presentations from the World Health Organization and from Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on the current status of the Inter Agency Standing Committee's Standard Operating Procedures to guide activation of response tools and mechanisms in global health crises.

I thank both of them for making themselves available to provide us with this update.

Thank you.