



PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Summary by the President of the General Assembly of the Multistakeholder Hearing in preparation of the United Nations General Assembly High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage

9 May 2023

**Trusteeship Council Chamber
United Nations Headquarters, New York**

Overview

The President of the General Assembly organized an interactive multistakeholder hearing on 9 May 2023 as part of the preparatory process for the United Nations General Assembly High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage (UHC), in accordance with General Assembly resolution 75/315. The interactive multi-stakeholder hearing, organized with the support of the World Health Organization and UHC2030, provided stakeholders with an opportunity to contribute to the preparatory process for the high-level meeting through a half-day of interactive panel discussions. The hearing was attended by Member States, as well as representatives of United Nations entities, civil society, non-governmental organizations, academia and the private sector, among other stakeholders.

The discussion focused on perspectives from stakeholders, sharing their experiences and recommendations on urgent actions and investments in health to accelerate progress toward the achievement of UHC by 2030, as well as to identify concrete milestones for a successful High-Level Meeting on 21 September 2023 and its Political Declaration. The hearing consisted of two panel discussions, entitled: “UHC as a driver to accelerate health for all” and “From UHC Commitment to Actions and Accountability”.

Opening Segment

The President of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Csaba Kőrösi, highlighted the significance of UHC as one of the most pressing issues of our time, indicating that it was a long-term investment in sustainable development. He underlined the strong linkage between achieving UHC and the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, saying that the concept of UHC goes beyond mere health services and encompasses broader social inclusion, gender equality, poverty eradication, and the protection of human dignity. The importance of including women, children, and vulnerable populations in access to healthcare was also underlined. While acknowledging that the right to health is a fundamental human right, he pointed out that billions of people worldwide still lack reliable access to basic and essential health services and health expenses push tens of millions of individuals into bankruptcy or heavy indebtedness each year. Therefore, he called for the recognition of UHC as a powerful instrument for achieving socioeconomic prosperity and reducing inequalities, with the ultimate goal of leaving no one behind.

H.E. Ms. Amina Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General, drew attention to the lack of access to healthcare for millions of people, which exacerbates inequalities and poverty. She underlined that UHC is globally recognized as the pathway to fulfilling the right to health for all and that it is both a key target and enabler of SDGs and entwined with other goals. She called for urgent political commitment and action on UHC, including increased investment in primary

health systems and government financing. She emphasized the need to reorient health systems to prioritize health promotion and disease prevention, involving all stakeholders. She noted that the upcoming High-level meeting on Universal Health Coverage is an opportunity to strengthen health systems, with a focus on people-centered, integrated, and equitable approaches, and expressed UN readiness to support Member States in this regard.

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization, spoke via a pre-recorded video, and was represented in person by Dr. Bruce Aylward, Assistant Director-General, Universal Health Coverage, Life Course. Dr. Tedros highlighted that COVID-19 had disrupted health systems around the world, depriving millions of essential health services, and setting countries back in their efforts to achieve UHC. He was alarmed that rising out-of-pocket payments are making financial risk an increasing barrier to care for people around the world. He reiterated that in all countries, national health plans are the essential pathway, with a focus on strengthening health systems through a primary health care approach. He highlighted that primary health care is also crucial to global health security. He shared three calls to countries: to invest more and invest better, through health financing policies that provide equitable access to services and improved financial protection; to take a whole-of-society approach by engaging civil society organisations and communities, especially marginalised populations, and to improve gender equality and youth participation; and to implement the commitments made in the Working for Health Action Plan for 2022 to 2030, so that every country has the national workforce capacity - with decent pay and working conditions - for public health, universal health coverage and health emergencies.

Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron, Co-chair, UHC2030 Steering Committee, highlighted that the UHC movement had published an Action Agenda called “From Commitment to Action”, developed through an inclusive, multi-stakeholder process. She explained that the UHC Action Agenda contains eight action areas that governments and leaders should implement to build resilient and equitable health systems, advance progress towards universal health coverage and health security and deliver health for all by 2030. She called on Member States to place health at the top of the political agenda, including by defining their own national implementation path. She called on parliamentarians to enact legislation that strengthens health systems, while actively engaging and collaborating with civil society and communities, to make governments accountable and transparent, and to allocate budgets that transform commitments into tangible results. She highlighted the role of the private sector in achieving UHC, including by improving research and development in health industries. The Co-chair called for improved accountability and social participation, and for the urgent strengthening of the health and care workforces, guaranteeing equal pay and equal representation at all levels of health. She also called on Heads of State and Government to commit to concrete actions, with clear milestones, to advance progress to achieve UHC, so as to establish a coherent framework for an integrated health agenda.

Panel 1: Universal Health Coverage as a driver to accelerate health for all

The first panel discussion was moderated by Dr. Githinji Gitahi, CEO of Amref Health Africa. It featured the following panelists: Ms. Emilia Saiz Carrancedo, Secretary-General, United Cities and Local Governments and UHC Movement Political Advisor, Ms. Nupur Lalvani, Founder and Director of Blue Circle Diabetes Foundation, Mr. Mahmood Al-Hamody, Vice-President for External Affairs, International Federation of Medical Students Association, and Ms. Myrna Cunningham, Vice-President, The Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The panel highlighted that achieving UHC is fundamental to achieving the sustainable development goals, particularly economic growth and improving education. They stressed the need for a strong common agenda to ensure the political declaration to be approved at the UN High-level meeting on UHC in September is action-oriented. They emphasized their support for the UHC Movement's Action Agenda and the eight action areas outlined in it.

- Panelists emphasized the need to move together and for countries to take a whole-of-society approach to achieve UHC. They highlighted the relationship between people, their environment, and nature and that guaranteeing universal access to clean water, hygiene, and clean public spaces is interlinked to progress on health.
- They called for formalized and institutionalized social participation to facilitate stakeholder consultations and communities' ability to influence and monitor health delivery. They also emphasized the need to remove barriers to participation and for processes to be more inclusive and transparent.
- The Political Declaration on UHC should recognize vulnerable people's needs, including indigenous populations, and guarantee their coverage. To leave no one behind, panelists highlighted that governments must include health service coverage for marginalized and vulnerable populations and commit to facilitating and driving the introduction of innovation in health.
- They emphasized that safe, accessible, affordable health technologies and innovations, such as Internet connectivity, common use of digital platforms and telemedicine would be key to expand population coverage, which can address inequities.
- Panelists emphasized the need to invest in and support the health and care workforce by investing in decent work and safe working conditions, including for young health workers and community health workers. There are no health systems without health workers.
- To achieve UHC, panelists highlighted the need to invest in primary health care as a driver and adopt interprofessional and training approaches to primary health care for health and care workers. Countries can learn from the good practices of Indigenous populations and traditional medicine, by taking a holistic approach to health and focusing on prevention.
- Participants emphasized that the three high-level meetings on health (pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, universal health coverage, and tuberculosis) at the United Nations General Assembly in September are a key opportunity to make progress on health goals and link UHC and health security. However, doing so will require a well-integrated, coherent agenda and narrative.
- Participants reiterated the action areas from the UHC Movement's Action Agenda and highlighted a number of key issues, including:
 - The need to strengthen health systems and to integrate specific health and disease interventions into UHC through a primary health care approach, including the prevention and treatment of non-communicable diseases, mental health, HIV, tuberculosis, oral health, sexual and reproductive health and to ensure the full realization of sexual and reproductive rights for all;
 - Remove user fees and ensure everyone can access the health services and commodities they need without financial hardship;
- The COVID-19 pandemic, along with the persisting impact of conflicts and the climate crisis, has reinforced the interdependence of UHC and health emergency preparedness. It is now evident that both these goals are deeply rooted in the health systems of every country. Urgent action is required from leaders to develop and allocate resources for

integrated approaches that support universal health coverage, while strengthening prevention, preparedness, and response capacities to address health emergencies. In sum, an equitable and sustainable focus on both of these aspects results in resilient and equitable health systems.

- In order to safeguard people from disruptions in essential health services during emergencies, governments must allocate adequate resources to ensure uninterrupted provision of primary healthcare. By prioritizing the resilience of primary healthcare systems, countries can effectively protect their populations and ensure vital health services are readily available, including in times of crisis.

In summing up, participants included calls for transparent and fair pricing of pharmaceutical and health commodities, highlighting the need for pharmaceutical companies and regulators to be held to account. Calls were also heard for gender-responsive budgeting and services. Furthermore, participants called for parliamentarians to be fully involved in decision-making about UHC reforms and oversight of implementation. They also called for a loss and damages fund through the Conference of the Parties (COP) to address the impact of climate change on health.

Panel 2: UHC commitments to actions and accountability

The second panel was moderated by Ms. Elisha Dunn-Georgiou, President and Executive Director of Global Health Council. The stakeholder panelists were Ms. Sarai Núñez Cerón, Vice President, IPU Advisory Group on Health, Dr. Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis, Former European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, UHC Movement Political Advisor, and WHO Special Envoy for the European Region; Ms. Olesya Struk, Senior Director Group Sustainability, Royal Philips; Dr. Lujain Alqodmani, President-Elect, World Medical Association, and Mx. Dumiso Gatsha, Founder, Success Capital Organization.

Speakers emphasized the need to enhance investment in comprehensive national health plans through sustainable domestic public financing for UHC. They further highlighted the virtues of reorienting health systems to focus on primary health care, which is the foundation for achieving UHC, enhancing health emergency preparedness and promoting health and well-being. They also highlighted their support for the UHC Movement's Action Agenda and the eight action areas outlined in it.

- The panelists highlighted that health should be considered as an investment, rather than a cost. UHC requires a strong political will at the highest level, which must be translated into policies, enabling laws and regulations, alongside adequate public financing to leave no one behind.
- Participatory mechanisms that are inclusive and provide platforms for vulnerable populations should translate into concrete actions to take to meet people's needs. In this regard, speakers highlighted the role of civil society organizations and communities in promoting UHC and delivering integrated services, including mental health.
- They stressed the need for a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach, pointing out the crucial role of parliamentarians in translating political commitments into reality and enacting enabling laws and regulations, as well as approving budget that paves the way for the achievement of universal health coverage, including to ensure the needs of the most disadvantaged groups are addressed and their voices are heard.
- Panelists highlighted the increasing rate of unemployment among young physicians and emphasized the need to adequately protect and support health and care workers,

including community health workers, and ensure medical staff are involved in designing health policies.

- The panel recognized the challenges around reporting on UHC and the need for governments to collaborate with civil society and marginalized populations in order to establish effective national mechanisms for UHC reviews and address the gaps in data that exist.
- Participants reiterated the action areas for the UHC Movement's Action Agenda and highlighted the need for governments to take a primary healthcare approach to achieve UHC.
- Speakers acknowledged that, by prioritizing primary health care, individuals and communities gain access to a comprehensive range of essential health services tailored to their needs. This approach ensures that health care is provided in a holistic manner, focusing not only on curative measures but also on preventive care, health promotion, and community engagement. Moreover, health systems that embrace primary health care are better equipped to respond to health emergencies.
- The need to remove barriers to health services for marginalized populations, including those living with disabilities, the poor, and individuals with comorbidities was a common theme. In particular, the need to provide financial protection, ensure unrestricted access to health services, and provide health and care workers with adequate training to provide quality care to everyone, everywhere, especially those often marginalized and with disabilities were echoed.
- Participants highlighted the need for more participation of parliamentarians in global discussions and emphasized the need for commitments to be embedded in national policies and laws, including specific targets and milestones.

In summing up, participants advocated for national health policy frameworks to establish participatory mechanisms that engage all stakeholders meaningfully and promote inclusive health governance. Social participation should be an integral part of all policy frameworks. Adequate national resources should also be allocated to inclusive health governance to foster trust and transparency.

Closing Segment

In her closing remarks, H.E. Ms. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett Ambassador Permanent Representative of Guyana to the United Nations commended the energy, enthusiasm and vigor of all participants and thanked them for their commitment to UHC. She highlighted that panellists and participants alike had been unequivocal in recognizing that health is a human right and that putting people at the centre of health policies and health systems is the only way to achieve health for all. She believed that all could agree that health is not a cost but an investment.

She provided an overview of the key points that she took away from the discussions, including that many participants recognized "primary health care as the central vehicle to achieving UHC, and political will as the fuel for this vehicle to move and go the distance". Ambassador Rodrigues-Birkett also noted the many interventions related to the improved health financing, strengthening community health systems, the importance of investing in and recognising the contributions of health care workers, use of digital health technologies, the need to increase efforts in relation to non-communicable diseases, as well as adopting a whole of society, participatory approach and for governments to ensure meaningful engagement and involvement of all stakeholders.

She hoped that, following a transparent inter-governmental negotiation process, Member States can arrive at a concise, action-oriented declaration agreed by consensus.

In his closing remarks, H.E. Dr. Suriya Chindawongse, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Thailand to the United Nations, offered an approach towards realizing universal health coverage which he named “Everything. Everywhere. All at once”. He explained that these were “starting point answers” to some critical questions about UHC. He highlighted that to the question of “What will be gained by UHC?”, the answer is “everything” because good health is the foundation of life, sustainable development and a sustainable future, and a pathway out of poverty. To the question “Where do we need to promote UHC?”, the answer is “everywhere”, because ensuring anyone is safe requires that everyone is safe; and he called for integrated approaches to the work in New York and Geneva, to the three high-level meetings on UHC, PPPR and TB in September 2023, and to the meaningful participation of all stakeholders. To the question of “How we should take forward our various ideas on UHC?” the answer is “all at once”, because there is great urgency to take coordinated action to achieve UHC through a participatory approach. He looked forward to a successful, results-oriented, people-centered and equitable Political Declaration on UHC in September 2023.