Thank you, Mister Chairperson,

On behalf of the Core Group on WHO Internship Reform, consisting of Algeria, Haiti, Jamaica, Mozambique and South Africa we have the following remarks:

Exactly one year ago, the Core Group, with the co-sponsorship of 12 WHO Member States from all regions, along with the participation of the interns themselves through the WHO Internship Board, successfully introduced WHA resolution 71/13 to initiate the process of reforming WHO’s Global Internship Program. We thank the Secretariat for the progress they have made over the last 12 months – the announcement of stipends has started the journey towards transformation of this important part of WHO’s mandate.

We are under no illusions about the scale of the challenge WHO faces in creating an internship programme that trains talented young professionals from across the world and builds future leaders in public health, in order to strengthen national health systems.

The Human Resources annual report spells out this challenge:

WHO received over 7000 applicants in 2018; the majority from developing countries. Yet, despite this record volume of applicants, only 25 percent of interns came from developing states, many of whom were studying in developed countries at the time of their internship. Unfortunately, during this period, we also saw Member State participation fall from 95 States to 77: 116 Member States did not have even one national represented on the programme in 2018.

Chairperson,

We recognize that transformation takes time. However, it is important that Member States understand the path that this transformation will follow. In particular, the way in which the new selection process will work, how the qualified applicants WHO receives will be reviewed, the criteria against which candidates will be assessed, and how WHO including through the regional and country offices, intends to recruit young health professionals to the program in the 116 Member States unrepresented in 2018. This process must be transparent to Member States and embedded in the procedures of WHO for the long term.

The Core Group would like to recognize the leadership of Dr Tedros and the Secretariat in announcing within the report the provision of a monthly stipend equivalent to 20% of the reduced daily subsistence allowance starting January 2020, in line with the objectives of the resolution. Financial assistance will reduce the financial barrier to accessing WHO’s opportunities, ensuring it can recruit talent from around the world. We would appreciate further details on how intern eligibility for funding will be assessed. There is also no mention in the human resources annual report of travel assistance to help those interns who need it.

The Core Group welcomes the decision by the Wellcome Trust to support 150 interns from low- and middle-income countries over a three year period, and we encourage other WHO partners to consider supporting the Internship Program, which is an integral part of WHO’s future. Can the Secretariat set out its plan to secure funding from internal and external sources in a way that will ensure the sustainability of this programme?

Chairperson,

Important steps have been made since this resolution was adopted but we are mindful of the progress still needed in implementing aspects of the reforms which are critical to ensuring stipends achieve public health objectives. We request that this autumn, WHO provides a detailed briefing to Member States on its implementation and funding strategy for the resolution ahead of the launch of stipends in January 2020.

Thank you chair.