Thank you Madam Chair.

Portugal aligns with the statement delivered on behalf of the EU.

WHO has an essential role to play in helping and guiding States to address the existing obstacles to access to safe, effective, quality-assured and affordable medicines, vaccines and health products. These obstacles exist, in different levels, for all countries around the world.

This is why Portugal decided to co-sponsor last year’s WHA decision 71(8). We thank WHO for the roadmap report which we welcome and deem very useful for WHO and its Member States.

Madam Chair,

The very high prices of some innovative medicines continue to constitute one of the greatest obstacles to access to medicines in Portugal and they have the potential to threaten the sustainability of the health system. Medicines for Hepatitis C or for cancer, in particular the new cancer therapies, are just examples of this reality.

As we have been saying during the last sessions of WHO governing bodies, promoting transparency throughout the value chain, strengthening pricing policies and cross-sector and cross-border collaboration for information-sharing, regulation and joint procurement of medicines constitute essential measures to enhance affordability and accessibility of medicines. We are very pleased that WHO report EB144/18 on cancer medicines, presented also under this agenda item, validates this understanding. We welcome this report. It is now time to jointly transform its proposed actions into practice.

Transparency is a fundamental value of modern, open and democratic societies. However, lack of transparency prevails throughout the pharmaceutical chain. As the cancer report rightly points out, and I quote, “Non-transparent medicine prices may conflict with the principles of good governance and confidential agreements may compromise clear lines of accountability. A lack of price and process transparency may even lead to corruption, especially in health care systems with weak overall governance”. End of quote.
R&D is, without any doubt, costly and has to be stimulated. However, we need to know how costly it is in order to understand how fairly or not is it being reflected in the final price of the medicine. WHO’s report concludes that “the costs of R&D and production may bear little or no relationship to how pharmaceutical companies set prices of cancer medicines” and “that they are set according to their commercial goals, (...) [thus] often making cancer medicines unaffordable and preventing the full benefit of the medicines from being realized”.

Madam Chair, this becomes even more relevant in the cases, not at all rare, where R&D is, to a good extent, made and financed by the public sector. As WHO report points out, “the public sector has made a wide range of contributions to the R&D of medicines, an investment that has often led directly to the discovery and development of cancer medicines. (...) They see a need to clarify whether the public has been “paying twice”, or should be paying twice, for medicines developed with at least partial support from public resources”. This is a matter of good governance, of respect for tax payer’s money and ultimately of respect for human rights.

To conclude, Portugal encourages WHO to prioritize fair pricing and transparency through a dialogue with all relevant dialogue in order to enhance access to medicines and thus contribute to the achievement of universal health coverage and of the human right to health.

Thank you.