Thank you Mr. President.

Portugal thanks WHO for all its work on the fight against non-communicable diseases. This fight is also a priority for us.

We welcome the renewed attention paid by WHO to mental health and the progress presented by the Director-General on his report to this Board. We underline, in particular, the importance of the training of health workers on human rights and mental health through WHO QualityRights’ tools.

Portugal attaches particular priority to the promotion and safeguard of human rights in the context of mental health. We provided comments to WHO’s web-consultation on the draft menu of policy options and cost-effective interventions asking that they are human rights-based.

Even though we welcome the references it contains to the respect for human rights and individual preferences, to stigmatization, discrimination and to the adherence to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we note that the proposed policy options are still very much embedded on a strictly biomedical mindset. Actually, most of the policies proposed are based on clinical interventions and medicalization.

Mr. President,

As recognized by the UN Human Rights Council in resolution 36/13, it is high time for a paradigm shift in mental health from an excessively biomedical approach to a people-centred, recovery-oriented, community and human rights-based approach.

Indeed, increasing evidence shows that individual treatment approaches over-relying on psychotropic medications and institutional care, and based on coercive, violent and punitive approaches, which often pretend to be treatment, can do more harm than good and violate human rights.
There are many incentives to overuse medications and to see psychosocial interventions as a luxury, and not to invest adequately in talking a range of community-based support services, psychosocial rehabilitation, and broader community development to tackle the underlying structural and social determinants of poor mental health and foster the social connection we all need to thrive in society.

However, the over medicalization of the mental health field, whereby social problems and challenges are medicalized and people are put on medication rather than provided with psychosocial care and other support does not improve population mental health and the potential harms of existing treatment.

WHO should be the first actor to play a leading role in this paradigm shift, essential to progress of the realization of the right to health.