Intervention by Tonga to the Executive Board on Agenda Item 6 Primary Health Care (EB 165/5)

Honorable Chairman, Hon DG,

1. Since this is Tonga’s first intervention, I have to say that Kingdom of Tonga is pleased and honored to be a Member of the WHO Executive Board. Our presence here is not only significant for Tonga, but more importantly, as a voice for my other fellow Pacific Island countries who are not represented here today.

2. I would like to begin by saying that Tonga appreciates the agenda item on primary health care and by thanking the Director-General for the draft operational framework. I would also like to remind my fellow Board members that any frameworks endorsed by the Executive Board must be practical at country-level and to please keep in mind, the needs and challenges of small island developing states.

3. Primary health care is of paramount importance to Pacific Island countries and areas, especially given our unique geography, which isolates us and leaves us susceptible to natural disasters and impacts of climate change, as eloquently noted by the DG’s Report when he visited Tonga – the “inundated rugby field where Tonga played a rugby test match with Fiji in 1924”. These factors create further challenges, including high cost of care, limited access to services, reduced scope and quality of services and lack of human resources.

4. Our primary health care needs continue to evolve with the changes of our modern world and the impacts of climate change. Not only must primary care systems be equipped to handle the strains of infectious diseases, but we must also be vigilant about providing services for noncommunicable and lifestyle diseases.
5. Tonga welcomes the start of the **Year of the Nurse and the Midwife**. As a former nurse, I can attest that nurses are the backbone of a strong primary health care system. In Tonga and in the Pacific, Nurses are often the first and only point of health care in communities.

6. As you consider the important topic of primary health care, I urge you, please do not forget about the needs of small island developing states in the Pacific and beyond.

7. Thank you Honorable Chairman.