Intervention by Tonga to the Executive Board on Agenda Item 7 on Universal Health Coverage (EB 146/6)

Honorable Chairman,

1. Tonga welcomes the discussion on universal health coverage.

2. For the several Pacific Island States with a combined population of over three million people living on more than a thousand islands, spread across the biggest ocean in the world – I refer to the Pacific Ocean of course! Tonga and the other Pacific Island countries and areas face special challenges in trying to cover the health care needs of every person.

3. The road to achieving UHC requires robust financing structures, strong partnerships and innovative approaches to health service delivery.

4. In Tonga, we have developed a Package of Essential Health Services that specifies the range of health care services for Tongans and it identifies the facilities, human resources, drugs and equipment required to provide these services, even in remote island communities.

5. As discussed in the previous agenda item, strong primary health care systems are the driving force for achieving UHC around the world. In remote areas like the Pacific where specialist care is often limited to larger hubs, prevention and promotion are the most cost-effective ways to ensure access to care.

6. In spite of the focus on prevention and promotion, we must be able to complete continuum of care as required by UHC: curative, rehabilitative and palliative care must also be available for everyone. An example of an innovative approach is the push for Affordable and Safe Surgery as recommended by the Lancet Commission Global Surgery, which is fully
supported by Pacific Island countries. This type of initiative is a very good opportunity for Tonga, in working on the **action domains** advocated by WHO to achieve UHC. This will ensure **that not just any health service** are available, but health services that have high standards of **quality, equity, efficiency, accountability, sustainability and is resilient** to emergency situations such as natural disasters and pandemic challenges. This will be part of the preparedness efforts we need to focus on, as indicated by DG in his opening remarks.

7. At the heart of our efforts will always be the communities we serve. Universal health coverage means that we must do whatever it takes to reach people in the most remote, hard-to-reach areas so that no one is left behind.

8. Thank you Hon Chairman.