

Statement by the Representative of Afghanistan at EB152

On Agenda Item II

Madam President,

Dr. Tedros, WHO Director General, Honorable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

السلام و عليكم و رحمت الله و بركاته!

At the outset, I thank Dr. Tedros for his historical leadership and the WHO team for their professional commitment and service, you leave a legacy of dedication, perseverance and love for humanity in the face of crisis.

In the 21st century, in my country, Afghanistan, following the two decades-long unprecedented engagement of the global community and despite of many regional and international commitments by our allies to help preserve, protect and promote human and women rights in particular, access to healthcare, and at the price of life of tens of thousands of Afghans and its allies – today;

- Afghanistan still remains one of the world's worst humanitarian crises
- Afghanistan experiences the winter with 18.9 million people facing food insecurity and unable to access or afford the food needed to live a healthy life
- There are 7 million children and mothers who are malnourished
- The climate crisis is compounding existing challenges as Afghanistan is facing its third year of drought.
- Globally, Afghanistan ranks 170th out of 170 countries for women's inclusion, justice and security
- The health system has lost the best of its human capital, and sustains its basic operations with technical and financial support of UN agencies
- The de facto authority in Afghanistan with whom the United States in agreement with the global community signed the Doha Agreement, has banned girls' education at secondary and University level and women are not allowed to work with national and international humanitarian NGOs.

In a traditional and conservative society like Afghanistan, banning women from humanitarian work results in banning women from access to humanitarian aid.

Restriction on women's access to education happens in a context where the health system was already suffering from lack of female human resources. The challenge was exacerbated with recent brain drain and the decision by the Health Ministry of the de facto authority to kick out all – **not some** – of high and mid-level managers and technical staff from the national Health institution.

The ongoing ban on women and girls' education means zero production of female healthcare personal, when coupled with brain drain it paves the ground to a disaster that if not addressed immediately, it can't be compensated with billions of dollars of humanitarian aid for coming generations,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The context I presented is very disappointing, there are questions yet to be answered on who to be blamed for what the 40 million people in Afghanistan are suffering from - should the ongoing

trend of blaming only Afghans for all what happened be kept on or it is the time to confess that it is the result of a joint failure and the responsibility to correct it is a shared responsibility.

In any condition, in the context of post August 15th crisis, on behalf of my people, I take this opportunity to thank and appreciate the efforts and resources provided by donor countries/organizations and the role played by UN agencies and WHO/EMRO at the top to bridge the gap and ensure the continuity of humanitarian assistance and life saving interventions to the population. As the result of these efforts, in short term, millions of lives were saved and health service delivery is maintained for the largest part of the population.

Madam President, in light of what I presented, there are few questions to be answered;

1. Can the ongoing level of health service delivery be sustained in Afghanistan where women and girls are not allowed to attend schools and universities resulting in zero production of female healthcare personnel?
2. Can National and International NGOs continue effective service delivery especially for women while being deprived of the opportunity to recruit female staff members?
3. Can the international community sustain the current level of financial resources for humanitarian assistance in the face increasing demand and emerging priorities?
4. And, what is our joint responsibility (beyond humanitarian assistance) toward the health of 40 million people of Afghanistan especially the mothers and children?

With all that said, while reiterating my message of thank and appreciation for the financial contribution of the donor agencies/nations, I urge and call on the global community that;

- The mysterious withdrawal from Afghanistan compromised our joint values and achievements, the current situation is a joint failure, but **Afghans are now paying the price alone**, if it continues for longer, according to the lessons taught by the history, the repercussions will be very costly and disappointing, **unless we use available opportunity to correct the course**,
- Afghanistan health system is a relevant and valid example, while its two decades improvements are at risk of collapse, during last 1.5 years, it has sustained its basic functions both financially and technically with UN support and can fall apart anytime this UN ventilator is disconnected,
- To avoid it, this is the time for a meaningful engagement of international community with Afghan experts to correct the course in light of lessons learned, ensure protection of last two decades achievements, and design today's investment in health system with the end in mind where equity, technical and financial sustainability is taken into consideration,
- As a practical step, in-depth engagement of humanitarian and development Organizations is required to ensure their plans and operations are aligned with humanitarian, development and peace nexus as a step toward efficiency and financial sustainability of the ongoing investments in health sector
- The last, but not the least, universal health coverage in Afghanistan will remain a dream unless we address the issue of female healthcare workers production, WHO EB is expected to take the lead by forming a coalition and advocate for medical and paramedical education for Afghan girls as a step toward global access to education and work for Afghan women and girls.

I thank you,