

## **TEXT OF SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE DELEGATION OF GREECE**

**(Mr Kouroumplis) Third plenary meeting, 18 May**

### **Agenda item 3: Address by Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General**

Mr Kouroumplis (Greece):

Madam General Director, dear colleagues, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

Globalization refuted those who believed in the alleviation of inequalities. Capital escapes to countries with cheap labour, while the poor escape to the developed countries seeking hope, often risking their lives in the process. Today, the widening of inequalities, the hyperconcentration of wealth and the spread of poverty are beyond dispute. Inevitably, and this is demonstrated in relevant polls, the credibility of world organizations and the confidence of common people in them are in decline.

In my opinion, in order to construct resilient health systems accessible to all at an age when public health budgets are coming under strain, there is a need:

Firstly, for member states to jointly negotiate, under the auspices of WHO, the prices of new medicines with the pharmaceutical industry so as to render them accessible to those in need.

Secondly, to reduce the duration of patents in order to increase the penetration of generics.

Thirdly, to delink the cost of R&D from the final price of medicines by introducing new models for the financing of pharmaceutical innovation that will serve patients instead of pharmaceutical companies.

With such initiatives, that greatly enhance the social return on public investment in health, we can increase confidence in WHO.

Greece, along with Italy, Malta and Cyprus are receiving enormous numbers of migrants and refugees fleeing from war zones. It is a humanitarian urgency to cater for their immediate needs and to shield both them and the local population from threats to their health. This requires cooperation at the international and especially at the European level for the support of infrastructure at the points of entry and to ensure hygienic and dignified conditions of hospitality that will prevent the possible transmission of communicable diseases. In order to deal with the migration crisis in the short term, the countries of first contact need to be supported while the burden needs to be shared amongst all EU member states.

Ladies and gentlemen, Greece is undergoing a deep economic and social crisis. Ten years ago the greek health system ranked amongst the best in the world. Today, following five years of extreme austerity, contraction of the welfare state, sharp reduction in salaries and explosive unemployment, the public health system is on the verge of collapse due to severe understaffing.

According to recent OECD data, Greece ranks in the last positions when it comes to staffing of its health system. In order to deal with the domestic humanitarian crisis, the Greek government will apply to the institutions of the EU for a special program for the support of its health system, aimed at the hiring of health professionals. In this initiative we would welcome the support of WHO.

Ladies and gentlemen, a few months ago a new government was elected in Greece that struggles for a democratic Europe that will champion labour and social rights, including the right to quality health services and needed medicines for all citizens without distinction.

The World Health Assembly can render WHO the most reliable world organization if we manage to demonstrate that we serve the interests of our peoples and not the interests of large corporations.

Greece looks forward to technical cooperation with WHO and is ready to contribute, with all its powers and knowledge, in the enshrinement of health as a primary social asset and a fundamental right for all humanity.

Thank you.