

TEXT OF SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE DELEGATION OF PORTUGAL

(Mr P. Moita de Macedo) Fourth plenary meeting, 19 May

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

Mr P. Moita de Macedo (Portugal):

Honourable President, Madam Director-General, Doctor Margaret Chan, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

I am here to tell you of my Country and of the recent Portuguese experience in health system's resilience in times of crisis.

In the financial and economic crisis we faced until mid 2014, and in line with the conclusions already adopted with the European Union, Portugal has pursued a number of reforms aimed to reinforce the effectiveness of our health system, its governance, to increase access to health care, namely to drugs, which became cheaper for the citizens in this period, and, as such, to improve the system's resilience.

Our management of the health system has been focused on health promotion and disease prevention, on structural reforms efficiency-based, aiming to do more with less, reducing excessive margins without reducing healthcare and reducing low value-added healthcare.

In regards to health promotion and disease prevention, we recently modified the legislation on alcohol, specifically prohibiting sale to underage, and also the legislation on tobacco, broadening the prohibition to smoke indoors.

In relation to efficiency, we entered on reforms on IT – based on data platforms and paper free processes, by usage of eHealth – and, also, management reforms, guided by ethic principles, accountability and transparency. A national network was created, called SINAVE, a national information system for epidemiological surveillance, which is a web-based platform that assures communication of disease cases from medical doctors to health authorities.

The Information System for Death Certificates (SICO) was created, allowing for paper-free death certificates, for statistical treatment of causes of death and for updating the National Health Service's user's database.

Focus on efficiency is an ethical imperative in times of crisis.

The National System for the Evaluation of Health Technologies (SiNATS) was created, in line with the best European practices, and it is an important step towards access to innovation, as it aims to obtain gains through an integrated model for technical and economical evaluation of drugs, medical devices and other health technologies.

These purposes of strengthening the system and, as well, of building resilient communities, lead us to constantly deepen the strength of public health capacity, to bet on prevention and also to intensify preparedness for public health emergencies. As an example of added value to the capacity and preparedness for such emergencies, I stress the *legionella* outbreak that occurred in Portugal in the fall 2014, an unprecedented outbreak (second largest at an international level), which was controlled in two weeks. It was an intersectoral effort, a learning process and, not least, an opportunity to strengthen the health system in response capacity.

I am in a position to confirm the resilience and robustness of our National Health Service, given that most indicators are still exhibiting a positive tendency and the upkeep of quality health gains. In fact, for example, infant mortality rate was in 2014 less than 2,8 per 1000.

The scourge that was the Ebola virus outbreak in some West African countries allowed us to confirm the impact of the lack of robustness of health systems. Portugal, in the framework of bilateral cooperation, financed and is now collaborating in the activities related with the operation of a portable diagnosis laboratory for communicable diseases with Guinea-Bissau, and we believe that in six months' time that country will be trained in diagnosis and surveillance of diseases such as Ebola Virus Disease or Malaria.

Finally, I need to address a matter which I believe to be essential and which is a major challenge to political action: to promote growth and authorize drugs which are truly innovative and to ensure an effective and sustainable access to them within the health system. Similar initiatives to those that recently took place regarding Hepatitis C will be repeated, you can trust me, in the near future, with new molecules produced by R&D actions, for treatment of that disease or others, namely cancer. Surpassing this paradox will boost the health system's resilience, which has limited resources and endures continuous pressures. It is, therefore, paramount to improve cooperation mechanisms towards lower opacity and better coordination in settling prices for innovation. Pharmaceutical companies will have to be called for these new times of adjustment.

I conclude with an aspiration, only attainable with a joint effort: that health systems aim and continuously obtain – not only in times of crisis – gains in efficiency, capacity, preparedness and response to emergencies. Thank you very much!