



European Union

Statement

WHO

156th Executive Board

(3-11 February 2025)

Agenda item 2 – Report by the Director-General

Geneva, 3 February 2025

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Chair,

Director General,

Excellencies,

Colleagues,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of the European Union and its 27 Member States.

The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia* as well as Armenia align themselves with this statement.

Every human being has the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The European Union thanks the Director General for the extensive report and commends the World Health Organization for its tireless efforts to achieve SDG3 – health and well-being for all. The EU reaffirms its strong commitment to WHO in these challenging times.

The report shows the role of effective international and regional cooperation as a complement and support to national action, which bears the final responsibility to address such challenges. Fostering inclusive collaboration between international and regional actors is crucial to counteract fragmentation in the global health ecosystem and ensure no person, country or region is left behind. We must focus on shared results, and critical programs. Working together on common agenda is increasingly important and strategic in the face of growing health threats and constrained financing.

The announced withdrawal from WHO expressed by the Organization's single largest donor country may have an impact on the Organization's financing. The European Union notes with concern the challenging financial outlook faced by WHO, whose actions have grown. Sustainable and predictable funding is vital to enable the Organization to plan and operate

* North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

effectively, and fulfil its mandate effectively. We urge all stakeholders to focus on the comparative advantages of WHO, ensuring it remains a leader in global health governance, while prioritizing its core functions to maximize impact. In this context, we welcome WHO's first investment round and reiterate our commitment to support WHO's financial resources predictability, flexibility and sustainability. Moreover, it is important to assess the cost implications of new suggested actions and to prioritize continuity of essential programs and actions.

Non-communicable diseases, as the leading cause of death globally are rightly placed high on the agenda, specifically thanks to this year's UN High-Level Meeting. The EU is pleased to work with the WHO and partners and share our experience in reducing the burden of non-communicable diseases, including cancer and cardiovascular disease, enhancing health promotion and prevention, and lightening the load on health systems.

Deterioration of mental health, particularly of the children and youth, sadly takes its deadly toll in our societies and requires urgent attention, in particular recognising the scale and impact of conflict on mental health. Equally, we note the profound and damaging impact of conflict on the health of women and children, in particular pregnant women and newborn children. In addition, antimicrobial resistance poses a serious threat to global health, requiring coordinated action through the One Health approach to contain this growing challenge. Climate change is increasingly contributing to the emergence, reemergence and spread of infectious diseases and weather and climate hazards are exacerbating existing health and gender inequalities. These and other determinants of health must be addressed in a systematic way in order to promote health and prevent disease – one of WHO's core tasks. The EU remains committed to moving forward the agenda related to the determinants of health.

In the interconnected world we live in, the question of global health security is ever more pressing. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the vulnerabilities of health systems. Furthermore, the declaration of Mpox as a public health emergency of international concern reminded us to take into account the lessons learned and stay vigilant and focused on securing safety and well-being of all persons. The WHO Hub for Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence and the European Surveillance System are well positioned to provide guidance, as well as universally acknowledged standards on surveillance. The EU's swift and comprehensive efforts to help control the Mpox outbreak in Africa showed yet again our commitment to health security. We stress the pivotal role of the WHO and congratulate Africa CDC for galvanising

national and regional efforts. The Mpox experience teaches us the importance of transparency so that national, regional and global efforts are coordinated and do not duplicate each other or leave gaps. Undoubtedly, to save lives, prevention and preparedness is key.

Important work is underway within the INB process and the EU and its MS remain committed to a successful conclusion of negotiations. Without prejudging their outcome, the success achieved at the 77th World Health Assembly with the adoption of the IHR amendments provides a solid basis for future work in this area. The WHO's Constitution recognizes that "the health of all peoples is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security". The EU and its Member States deplore the rising number of health emergencies related to the ongoing armed conflicts causing devastation and deep human suffering in Ukraine, the Middle East, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Yemen and elsewhere. Across the globe, 305 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance – a staggering reality that reflects the unrelenting pressure on communities and health systems worldwide. We commend the admirable, lifesaving WHO work in emergencies, including on mental health. We will continue calling on all parties to armed conflicts to fully uphold international humanitarian law, refrain from attacks, safeguard medical personnel and healthcare facilities, and aim for ceasefire. As often underlined by the Director-General, there cannot be health without peace, and there cannot be peace without health.

To achieve SDG 3, we need, we must invest in robust health systems, prevention, strengthen health promotion and primary healthcare, and promote equitable access to essential health services, which are necessary for achieving universal health coverage along with gender equality. It can be achieved through sustainable, accelerated and flexible financing.

The EU remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the outcomes of their review conferences and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), in this context.

Noting the need for appropriate governance and regulation, ethical standards, and equitable access, we emphasize the importance of research and innovation, fuelling the development of affordable, new and promising medicines, treatments and technologies, such as responsible use of artificial intelligence to improve disease prevention, diagnosis, and treatment, including those with low prevalence.

The European Union recognizes the critical role of a skilled and motivated health and care workforce in delivering multidisciplinary quality services. We support WHO's efforts to strengthen health workforce planning and education, such as the opening of the WHO Academy, and to improve working conditions for healthcare professionals, also in humanitarian emergencies. We believe that investing in the health and well-being of health and care workers and their training is essential for ensuring the sustainability and resilience of health systems.

The global health challenges ahead are tremendous, and we all need WHO's leadership to develop evidence-based standards and guidelines to protect health security and support healthier populations worldwide. We are concerned that recent politicization of discussions happens at the expense of WHO's work and of global health. We urge all Member States to prioritize public health as our shared compass in working with WHO.

With appreciation of the inclusive process in the development of the comprehensive Fourteenth General Programme of Work (GPW14), the European Union and its Member States remain committed to working closely with WHO and partners to address the challenges and build a healthier future for all.

Thank you.