

Statement by ESTONIA on behalf of Nordic and Baltic countries at WHA-73

Honourable President,
Distinguished Director-General,
Distinguished Delegates,

I am speaking on behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden.

The Nordic and Baltic countries would like to express our gratitude and **full support to the WHO in leading the global health response** in this crisis, which is challenging our health systems, societies and economies. The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated how crucial **multilateral cooperation** is to our collective health, prosperity and security. Now more than ever, we need to act together as a global community and leave no one behind.

In particular, global coordination is needed when it comes to the **availability of new vaccines, diagnostics and treatments**. We call on **global solidarity** and a global agreement among all actors **to secure equitable and fair distribution**, once they become available.

The pandemic has both **direct and indirect impact on the wellbeing of people**. In all societies the poor are hit the hardest, widening the already existing health and social inequalities. We must take action to counter these ill effects of the pandemic. We call all Governments to take measures to protect the vulnerable, to increase supportive frameworks and social protection.

Further, we would like to emphasise the importance of **addressing the gendered impacts** of the COVID-19 pandemic. The health, social and economic consequences have a disproportionate effect on women and girls. Women constitute up to 70% of frontline health workers and are facing an increased risk of exposure to the virus. While access to essential health services, including sexual and reproductive health rights, is limited during the crisis, evidence shows that there is an increase in maternal and child mortality, and violence against women. At the same time, the disease has been particularly serious in older men and they make up a large percentage of mortality. We therefore encourage all countries to apply a gender lens in their COVID-19 response and recovery plans.

The escalation of COVID-19 cases in conflict areas, among refugees, migrants and other vulnerable people in countries with weak health systems is a real concern and might have a detrimental impact on global well-being and stability. We very much welcome the one UN consolidated appeal as part of **COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan** and highly value the work of WHO and all the health and humanitarian workers in the front-line.

Finally, we support an **independent and comprehensive evaluation** of the international health response to the current pandemic. It would facilitate an effective, accountable and impartial review of the response with a view to strengthen the global preparedness in the future. There are certainly many lessons to be learned. This evaluation should however **not divert our attention from the current efforts** at the global level to put an end to the ongoing pandemic.

The right to health is a fundamental human right. The commitment of WHO and the Member States to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and leaving no one behind should be our guiding light going forward.