

World Health Assembly

9th November, 2020

H.E Excellency Director General Tedros

Health Ministers

Representatives

Dear excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen:

At the very outset, I would like to express my deepest condolence at the loss of lives given COVID-19 pandemic that has significantly disrupted the lives and livelihoods across the globe and overwhelmed the health systems in governments.

Afghanistan is also among the countries hit by COVID-19 pandemic. Many of health professionals have lost their lives for COVID in Afghanistan. We salute the cause they fought for, and still many do fight, the cause of humanity and health, commitment, and sacrifice.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted some of the significant gaps in hospitals, healthcare facilities and public health functions requiring immediate and innovative solutions.

Excellencies!

The Ministry of Public Health feels the need to make Afghanistan's health system more resilient to overcome epidemics. My team and I are working with a wide range of international and national stakeholders to respond to the pandemic while ensuring that the lessons are well-captured and embedded into health system. We learned that health system that is equity-based and people centric is inevitable to overcome the challenges of our time. Afghanistan's health sector transformation and reforms are focused on three major areas:

- (1) Effective response and recovery from COVID19 and other upcoming epidemics;
- (2) Transformation of primary health care services;
- (3) Reform of hospital sector;
- (4) Reach the Polio eradication goal;
- (5) Reform in pharmaceutical market and food security in Afghanistan.

Effective response to and recovery from the pandemic is a key priority to the Government of Afghanistan, and we remain committed to timely management of the situation in the country. The data indicate that during the first wave of COVID-19, the utilization of healthcare services was declined, immunization gap was observed. Therefore, we have the highest number of polio cases compared to the previous years.

Your excellencies,

We are working on improving modality of implementation of the current primary healthcare services. Our focus is to improve access to maternal, newborn, child and basic health services by establishing “Family Health Houses” in the villages of Afghanistan so that the health and immunization services are provided close to families, women and children. We are also leading the provision of routine health care services in addition to the fight against COVID-19.

Dear colleagues,

The hospital sector in Afghanistan needs a lot of support and investment so that it can properly respond to the situation including emerging diseases and needs.

In the last 20 years, the hospital sector was under invested, and therefore, we need technical and financial support from our partners and donors to improve the hospital services. Now we are working on hospital transformation plan. We will have emergency hospitals in almost all districts of the country in addition to having general hospitals that will be equipped with CT-Scan, MRI, and other standard diagnostic lab equipment.

Polio eradication program in Afghanistan focuses on immunization coverage and combating the virus. However, other vital social indicators that play important role in polio eradication have been neglected. Our team will work with the international health stakeholders to develop a comprehensive plan, considering all the important aspects of fighting against polio virus to make Afghanistan a polio- free country.

Dear colleagues,

The Government of Afghanistan is committed to providing healthcare services to all Afghans. Therefore, we believe that our health transformation plan would be the best solution to reach every Afghan in the remotest area in the country and provide them quality healthcare services. In today's meeting, I request all our development partners to support our new plan and provide us technical and financial support to achieve our goals.

At Last, I would like to say that AFG conference in Geneva will take place on 23-24 Nov. on "Peace, Prosperity and Self-reliance" a joint Governments of AFG, Finland and the UN collaboration in which economic priorities in light of pandemic and aid effectiveness will be discussed, among others, is an important endeavor. An official invitation has been sent to the WHO Director-General and we look forward to having WHO on board in that conference and for our President to meet the Director-General COVID situation permitting.

Thank you.