World Health Assembly Agenda Item 13.2: Political Declaration of the Third High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases

Statement by the Gambia at the 74th session of the World Health Assembly, 24 May – 1 June 2021

The Gambia wishes to thank the WHO Secretariat for bringing this agenda item 13.2, with specific reference to oral health, to the attention of the august Assembly- World Health Assembly 74. Indeed, draft Executive Board Resolution - EB148.R1- on Oral healthadopted at its 148th session and tabled before this Assembly is a laudable initiative.

The Gambia is equally concerned that oral diseases have become an important global public health problem with about half of the world's population suffering from oral diseases such as dental caries, periodontal disease, and tooth loss without any notable improvement of the situation between 1990 and 2017. The African Region is not spared from this global phenomenon, where an estimated 480 million people suffered from oral diseases in 2019 with significant inequalities, disproportionately affecting marginalized populations throughout the life course.

We are aware that NCDs in general are poorly funded despite the overwhelming scientific evidence we have on their magnitude and consequences for socio-economic development.

However, overall, The Gambia continues to make progress towards achieving the global NCD targets set in the global action plan for the prevention and control of NCDs 2013-2020, The Gambia is reviewing its national NCD policy and have started as of March 2021 to develop a new 5-year national NCD strategy and costed action plan, supported by World Bank and The Defeat-NCD Partnership at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research. The new strategy will set clear interventions and expand the service package provided by the health system aiming to accelerate the country's progress ~~to~~ towards achieving the global targets.

The Gambia has also customized WHO Essential Package on NCD interventions (WHO-PEN) protocols and has just completed an assessment of public health facilities to determine their readiness to implement this package.

The Gambia, through support of the WHO, has made significant progress in implementing some of the Best Buys for NCD prevention and control, notably in tobacco taxation.

Regarding oral health, the main subject for discussion today, The Gambia wishes to commend the WHO Regional Committee for Africa for adopting, in 2016, the "Regional oral health strategy 2016−2025: Addressing oral diseases as part of noncommunicable diseases".

We do face different challenges in implementing this strategy, largely due to our already over-stretched health systems with competing priorities exacerbated by the growing covid-19 pandemic.

In conclusion, the Gambia fully endorses this draft EB Resolution EB148.R1 tabled before this Assembly, and urges the WHO to support countries in strengthening the health systems,

particularly in the areas of human resources capacity and surveillance to fully integrate oral health into basic health services for universal health coverage and to simultaneously monitor the magnitude and burden of oral diseases.

Thank you

Signed

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