RSA STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE 74TH SESSION OF THE WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

TIME LIMIT: 3 minutes

AGENDA ITEM NO: 16 COMMITTING TO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR WOMEN'S, CHILDREN'S AND ADOLESCENTS' HEALTH (2016-2030)

Madam President,

1. We wish to align with the joint statement that has been made by Sweden on behalf of a group of likeminded countries.

2. This statement rightly points out, the impact of COVID-19 demonstrates how critical effective health systems and universal health coverage are in times of crisis. Investing in health and health systems for all, while leaving no one behind, must be a top priority.

3. My government recognises that sexual and reproductive health and rights are integral to Universal Health Coverage. SRHR services should be of good quality, affordable, and accessible to all persons, including women and girls. Such services should be offered to all, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identities, free from stigma, discrimination, coercion, and violence.

4. We have observed in our Continent, as in other parts of the world, that COVID-19 has deepened inequalities, both socio-economic and in terms of access to health services, particularly SRHR services. This pattern occurs whilst gender inequality has also deepened, with reports of increased gender-based violence and femicide, as a result of the measures that had to be taken to curtail the pandemic's spread.

5. Furthermore, the pandemic has highlighted the central role of immunisations for women and children, in the fight against diseases and the need for a more holistic approach to immunisation. Moving forward, strong immunisation systems will be required to ensure global herd immunity and meeting the 2030 targets.

6. South Africa therefore proposes that the work on the development of the new "Working for Health" five-year action plan, should start now, and should take into account current and future challenges.

Madam President,

7. We agree with Sweden that the world needs more robust and resilient healthcare systems, and with SRHR at the core of the health agenda, as we respond to the ongoing crisis and build back stronger.

8. Moreover, we should not lose sight of the fact that we seek universal access to services. For decades the people of occupied territories have been left behind when it comes to service delivery. When we

reflect on the inequalities that have been brought about by COVID-19, we should be mindful of the more devastating impact, that concerted attacks on people who live in occupied territories like Palestine face. To step up the dispossession of people in the current time of crisis, including by military means, simply cannot be acceptable.

9. I Thank you.