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Statement by the Hon Akilah Byron Nisbett, Minister of Health et al., Federation of St Kitts and Nevis

74th World Health Assembly, May 24th – June 1st, 2021

Madam President

Director General

As the World continues to note the debilitating social and psychological effects of the Coronavirus pandemic on our countries, it is important for us to embrace more than ever, the principle of "Leaving no one behind".

It is apt, that the theme chosen for this year's World Health Assembly is "Ending this pandemic, preventing the next: building together a healthier, safer and fairer world". Considering the ongoing COVID-19, indeed, there must be a strong emphasis and concurrence on "building together a healthier, safer and fairer world".

Madam President, while St Kitts and Nevis is grateful to have access to vaccines, it is disconcerting that there are countries with little or no access. Vaccination is the solution to the safe arrest of the pandemic and if we are to ensure a "safer and fairer world", and "build together", then it is important for everyone and all countries to have equitable access to safe and efficacious vaccines.

The Government of St. Kitts and Nevis commends the efforts of Director General Dr. Tedros of the WHO and Dr Gebre of PAHO for their efforts in ensuring vaccine accessibility to all, including our country, through the COVAX facility.

Further, Madam President, St. Kitts and Nevis has also been fortunate to access COVID-19 vaccines through a kind donation by the Government of India, to whom we wish to publicly extend our gratitude. To date, the Federation has inoculated 53.7% of our eligible population with the first dose of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine and 19.9% with the second dose.

In addition, Madam President, St. Kitts and Nevis is indebted to the Republic of China, Taiwan who provided us with COVID-19 supplies and resources including a commitment to assist in the procurement of vaccines. Taiwan has assisted many countries in the fight against COVID-19 and St. Kitts and Nevis maintains the clarion call to include Taiwan as an observer in the World Health Organization. COVID-19 has underscored the importance of "leaving no one behind". Taiwan must not be left behind!

Madam President, the impact of COVID-19 has highlighted an urgent need for a stronger focus on mental health issues. In fact, COVID-19 has unearthed the weaknesses within our Health Systems relative to mental health. I am pleased to inform that in collaboration with PAHO, St. Kitts and Nevis has initiated a Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (SKNMHPSS) Committee, of which the main goal is to reduce suffering and improve the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of persons during the pandemic and other disasters. The WHO must be commended for highlighting mental health as an agenda item and certainly we look forward to the associated successes.

Finally, we wish to thank the Director General and the team of the WHO for their continued commitment to ending the COVID-19 pandemic. May your efforts resoundingly redound to a “healthier, safer and fairer world” during and after this pandemic.