Seventy-fourth Session of the World Health Assembly: Agenda Item 3
Ending this pandemic, preventing the next: building together a healthier, safer, and fairer world
(2 minutes – 300 words approx.)

Your Excellencies, ladies, and gentleman,

I am honored to deliver this statement in my capacity as the Executive Director of the Stop TB Partnership, hosted by the United Nations Office for Project Services in Geneva.

The Stop TB Partnership is committed to the interconnected fight against COVID-19 and TB, the top two infectious causes of death that, combined, killed almost 4 million people in 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic has rolled back – by as much as 12 years – our global efforts to end TB by 2030. Pandemic-related restrictions, diversion of TB resources, overwhelmed healthcare systems, and similarities in disease symptoms made it difficult to find, diagnose, and treat people with TB.

But this is a message of hope, not despair. We can find solutions if we use lessons learned in 2020 and maintain the political will to tackle pandemics.

The fight against TB has informed the COVID-19 response. High TB burden countries have applied the expertise of doctors and nurses from TB units to airborne infection control systems, contact tracing, and community-based screening and diagnostics.

Because TB and COVID are very similar. If we are genuine about addressing airborne infectious diseases, we need an integrated, people-centered, rights-based approach.

We have struggled to end TB for years, although it's preventable and curable, due to lack of political and financial investment. TB research and development receives a pathetic USD$900 million per year, less than half of what is needed and what Member States have promised. Approval of a new vaccine is not expected before 2027.

But COVID-19 has shown how we can invest billions in one disease and more than USD$100 billion to roll out new vaccines at breakneck speed.

Ladies and gentlemen, we don't have the luxury to forget TB. Every person who is not diagnosed and treated infects tens of others.

We have until December 2022 to fulfil the UN TB targets and commitments and Member States must respond to the Secretary-General's recommendation to hold a UN High-Level Meeting on TB in 2023.

Like it or not, the clock is ticking.