

**Country: Belize**

**Committee A**

**Items: (13.1 & 13.2)**

**May 25, 2023**

**Agenda item 13.1 Universal Health Coverage**

Belize thanks the Director General for the report on item 13.1. Belize is committed to achieving Universal Health Coverage and has been strengthening its health systems towards this achievement. Universal health coverage means that everyone receives quality health services, when and where they need them, without incurring financial hardship. The UHC essential service coverage index for Belize has been increasing over time and was estimated at 67% in 2019 using a scale of 0 to 100, set by WHO. This is defined as the average coverage of essential services based on tracer interventions that include reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health, infectious diseases, noncommunicable diseases and service capacity and access, among the general and the most disadvantaged population.

As a measure of SDG indicator 3.8.1, the UHC service coverage index combines 14 tracer indicators of service coverage into a single summary measure. This indicates that while this indicator has been improving over time, there is still great work ahead as we continue the movement towards achieving Universal Health Coverage by undertaking relevant reforms in the health sector.

In addition, according to the WHO Global Health Expenditure database, government health spending in Belize as a percentage of health spending has been progressively increasing over the years from 53.1% in 2005 to 71.8 in 2020, with out-of-pocket spending decreasing over this 15-year period from 32% in 2005 to 21.9% in 2020. This indicates that the increased government investments in health is relieving individuals' out-of-pocket expenditures and decreasing the financial burden of healthcare, especially for vulnerable groups.

Efforts are being made to strengthen the primary health care approach and improve financing for health including the expansion of the coverage under the National Health Insurance scheme. Let me say that approximately 35% of the population is already covered by a National Health Insurance for primary health care services, and it is currently being expanded to the northern part of Belize where it will cover another 20% of the population.

Strengthening health systems based on a strong primary health care model is crucial to building back better and accelerating progress towards Universal Health Coverage and health security. As we aim to continue this movement and achieve greater health gains, it is imperative for us to work together with all stakeholders to reorient our health systems to primary health care as a resilient foundation for universal health coverage.

**Item: 13.2 Political Declaration of the third high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases and mental health.**

Belize also thanks the Director General for the report on item 13.2. Non-communicable diseases are the leading cause of death and disability globally, killing more than three in five people worldwide and responsible for more than half of the global burden of disease.

These health problems are causing and perpetuating poverty while hindering economic development in low- and middle-income countries. If they continue their upward trend, NCDs are estimated to cause a cumulative loss of output of \$47 trillion between 2011 and 2030.

With Belize concluding the implementation the National Plan of Action for the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases 2013-2023 this year, it is imperative for us to conduct a robust evaluation of this plan to identify gaps and bottlenecks in the health system. While many strides have been made in the last decade, we are cognizant that more needs to be done in order to address this public health issue. It therefore vital for us to join forces with key partners and stakeholders so as to ensure maximum health gains. **The burden is already too heavy to bear.** Belize has not quantified the economic nor the social burden being placed on families by the complications and premature mortality associated with NCDs. However, there is evidence that young adults in the productive age are already being classified with resulting disabilities.

As governments, it is important for us to share agendas with our UN partners as a follow up to the last high-level meeting on NCDs in 2018. If NCDs are our number one killer, then addressing the determinants and root causes should be our number one priority. We must commit together and strengthen leadership and governance in all areas to have the necessary resources and capacities to overcome these obstacles and the burden of NCDs. We recognize these are complex health and social issues, but we are also confident that as a global community, we can work together to develop and implement robust evidence-based policies and programs to combat the burden of NCDs. As a country, Belize remains committed!

I thank you!