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**Seventy-ninth World Health Assembly
Sub-item 12.4 – Universal health coverage**

2' speaking time – 2 minutos e 24 segundos

Chair,
Director-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

Portugal aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and is grateful to the Director-General for the comprehensive report.

Universal Health Coverage is not only a health objective. It is also a measure of our capacity to protect the human right to health, dignity and social cohesion in times of uncertainty.

Today, too many people still face barriers in accessing healthcare due to financial and geographical constraints. Others mistrust the system, while many continue to experience stigma and discrimination. This remains a challenge of equity, access, and public trust in health systems.

Portugal therefore welcomes the continued focus on resilient and people-centred health systems, including discussions on integrated care, health workforce sustainability and equitable access to innovation.

We would like to highlight three priorities:
First, primary healthcare must remain the foundation of Universal Health Coverage and resilient health systems.



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Second, investment in the health workforce is essential. Health systems cannot be resilient if health workers are exhausted, undervalued or experiencing unsustainable levels of out-migration. Retention, training and ethical international recruitment and mobility must remain priorities.

Third, innovation must reduce inequalities, not deepen them. Advances in artificial intelligence, digital health and diagnostic technologies will only fulfil their promise if they are guided by strong governance frameworks and ensure equitable, affordable and sustainable access for all.

Portugal also stresses that mental health, vaccination and care for people living with rare diseases must be fully integrated within Universal Health Coverage strategies.

At a time of growing fragmentation, Universal Health Coverage remains a powerful demonstration that collective action can still translate into tangible improvements in people's health and well-being.

Thank you.

277 words