Mr. Chair,

Belgium fully aligns itself to the statement made by Austria on behalf of the EU and its member states.

First of all we would like to welcome that the WHO has established a dedicated Department of Social Determinants of Health in 2019, this underlines the importance WHO attaches to this topic. Belgium is convinced that a structural approach is needed to address health inequities and adequate social health protection plays a pivotal role in this regard. COVID-19 has clearly highlighted and deepened the health inequities both within and between countries. The most vulnerable people have been severely impacted both by the pandemic and related mitigation measures, with cross-over effects for the poorest, women, persons with disabilities, frontline workers and people with insecure jobs, and we need to make sure that current and future policies address these health inequities, including by mainstreaming gender and by taking into account the digital divide.

We strongly welcome the WHO manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19. The manifesto clearly underlines that human health is intrinsically linked with environmental health and that we need to take ambitious steps to protect and restore the environment in order to fend of future pandemic threats. Increasing the uptake of healthy and sustainable diets will in our opinion be a crucial lever to reverse environmental degradation, increase human health and reduce future pandemic risk and we are looking forward to fruitful discussions at the upcoming UN food systems summit. Belgium firmly beliefs that increased multisectoral and multilateral cooperation is needed, with international organisations that are fit for purpose, to achieve the Agenda 2030, including its health-related commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.