Statement ahead of the World Health Assembly

21 May 2021

As the World Health Assembly opens on 24 May 2021, we are encouraged by the emerging consensus on the need for bold, decisive, and urgent action to end this pandemic and protect the world from the next. We share many of the ambitions and recommendations set out in the reports to the Assembly from the Independent Panel, the IHR Review Committee and the IOAC. We particularly welcome the clear, bold and timebound recommendations of the Independent Panel.

We remain deeply concerned by the global COVID-19 situation. Many countries are facing a surge in cases, hospitals and health workers are overwhelmed, and oxygen and COVID-19 treatments are in critically low supply. In other parts of the world, concerns about COVID-19 are receding as cases decline and restrictions on travel and physical distancing are being lifted. Some countries have sufficient vaccine to begin vaccinating children, who have very low risks of severe disease, while others cannot even vaccinate their healthcare workers. The ACT-Accelerator faces a huge shortfall in financing for developing and delivering the new tests, treatments and vaccines the world needs. This includes the COVAX facility which is also facing significant vaccine supply challenges. Current systems have failed to deliver equitable access to the effective countermeasures needed to end this pandemic.

We live in a world of extreme fragmentation and inequality. A world in disorder.

Preventing the next pandemic requires significant changes to these systems and commitment at the highest level to achieve and sustain them. The World Health Assembly is the paramount international body responsible for pandemic preparedness and response. We call on WHO Member States to take the following actions:

First, support equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, including through fully financing the COVAX facility. Alongside this, it is crucial that governments with access to supplies this year from bilateral deals share vaccine doses now through COVAX, in parallel to their national rollouts, alongside a roadmap for increasing this supply-sharing.

Second, commit to immediately begin negotiations on an international agreement for health emergency preparedness and response. The world has strong instruments to address climate change and maintain financial stability, but no comparable instrument for pandemics. We support the proposal for an international framework convention on pandemic preparedness and response, under the auspices of WHO, to strengthen and complement the IHR, ensure sustainable financing, support R&D and equitable access to countermeasures, empower WHO, and ensure accountability. We join the Independent Panel in calling for negotiations on such a treaty to be initiated and concluded as quickly as possible.

Third, ensure sustained political commitment to pandemic preparedness and response at the highest-level, with broad multisectoral and UN-wide support. We have called for the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, and the heads of International Financing Institutions to convene a UN Summit on Global Health Security. We welcome the call from the Independent Panel for a Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly to adopt a political declaration on pandemic preparedness. We recognize that such political commitment must be sustained at the highest level and look forward to further discussions on the Independent Panel’s proposal for the establishment of a Global Health Threats Council.
Fourth, commit to a substantial increase in WHO assessed contributions. All countries share the benefits and therefore the responsibility for preparedness and response. It requires sustained, predictable, and flexible financing at the scale required, based on fairness and burden-sharing. We support proposals for development of a financing mechanism for pandemic preparedness and surge response financing based on ability-to-pay, outside of ODA funding, and managed within the World Bank and IMF.

Averting the next pandemic is not beyond our reach but it requires a wholehearted commitment to change. It will require multisectoral collaboration, engagement with private sector and civil society, and empowerment of people.

We urge you to reject any limited ambitions for change, and act boldly, decisively, and immediately.

The world cannot wait any longer.

**About the GPMB**

As an independent monitoring and advocacy body, the GPMB urges political action to prepare for and mitigate the effects of global health emergencies. Co-convened by the World Bank Group and the WHO, the GPMB works independently to provide expert assessments and recommendations on the state of global preparedness. The opinions and recommendations of the GPMB are those of the Board and do not necessarily represent the views of the World Bank Group and WHO.

For further details contact gpmbsecretariat@who.int