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**STATEMENT BY MR MASSIMO PRESENTE, REPRESENTATIVE,
ORBIS INTERNATIONAL**

Mr Chairman, Your Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates:

ORBIS is a blindness prevention non-governmental organization (NGO) active in the region since 1982. Our high-visibility programme, the Flying Eye Hospital, is familiar to millions of people. We are grateful to all Member States in the Western Pacific Region for their growing support to the Global Initiative for the Elimination of Avoidable Blindness and Visual Impairment: VISION 2020, The Right to Sight.

Your support has not only ensured the adoption of World Health Assembly resolutions WHA56.26 in 2003 and WHA59.25 in 2006, but it has significantly contributed to the measurable reduction of avoidable blindness worldwide in recent years. Vision 2020 and national planning workshops continue to be held as we speak. Many countries have formally declared their support for VISION 2020 and have developed National Eye Care Plans that guide the efforts to create improved accessibility and availability of high quality eye care.

However, much remains to be done. More than one quarter of the world's blind people live in the Western Pacific Region. With limited investments, a dramatic impact can be made to change this, since 80% of all blindness and visual impairment can be avoided either through cost-effective prevention measures, or by treatment.

ORBIS International stands together with other blindness prevention NGOs active in the region to support Member States in this challenge. We respectfully ask this honourable assembly to, therefore, include blindness and visual impairment in the WHO's Eleventh General Programme of Work and in the Medium-term Strategic Plan, as urged in World Health Assembly resolution WHA59.25.