



South Centre Statement at the Meeting of Ministers of Health of the Member States of the Non-Aligned Movement

Geneva, 22 May 2018

Mr. President, Honourable Health Ministers, Ambassadors and delegates from the Member and Observer Countries of the Non-Aligned Movement,

Excellencies, Mr. President,

This is a historic moment for the countries of the South. For the first time in the 70 years of existence of the World Health Organization, a Director General from Africa has been appointed. We could ask ourselves if the election of Dr. Tedros (as he wants to be called informally) would have been possible without the active participation of the member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement. This appointment opens an opportunity for WHO to focus its attention on the health problems of the populations of the planet that are in most need.

The South Centre, which I represent here today, is the intergovernmental organization created by the countries of the South, to promote the collaboration and solidarity of developing countries towards their common objectives, seeking unity in diversity. The Governing Board of the South Centre is also currently privileged to be chaired by one of the leaders of contemporary Africa, and of the struggle against apartheid, the former president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki.

In the efforts for universal access to health, the group of Non-Aligned countries has many things in common that must unite them, many points in which we can find unity amid the diversity that characterizes our countries. We should search for a way to reinforce our ability for joint action in a world where health problems have no borders but where health solutions, such as access to medicines, exist but are sometimes difficult to achieve for our peoples.

This unity should be strengthened to ensure that WHO effectively serves developing countries on critical issues, such as the search for a new model for medicines research, an effective solution to the problem of antibiotic resistance, or the promotion of regulatory frameworks and intellectual property rights that ensure access to all medicines, including generic biologics.

I would like to reiterate the commitment of the South Centre to support the member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement in their efforts to achieve universal access to health. The South Centre will give priority to research, generation of ideas and proposals for the examination of its member countries, according to its functions under the Agreement Establishing the South Centre, 20 years ago. In the dissemination of initiatives and proposals, the South Centre will increase its efforts to make the results of its work available to the countries, recognizing the cultural diversity, capabilities and needs of our countries.

Health as a fundamental human right means that access to health services and essential medicines are the obligations of States. Therefore, the philosophy on which universal health coverage should be based must be solidarity and equity through public financing.

84 per cent of the WHO budget is currently in the hands of a group of voluntary donors consisting of a small number of industrialized countries and philanthropic foundations from these countries. This is one of the most serious challenges facing WHO: how to overcome the gradual loss of control by the member States of the regular, public and mandatory budget. In less than 20 years, more than 50 per cent of the budget went from being financed by public funds (constituted by regular contributions), to the current level of 16 per cent. This situation compromises the independence and direction of the activities of the Organization.

Excellencies, once again the South Centre reiterates its commitment to support the Non-Aligned countries so that there is close and effective cooperation among developing countries to strengthen a global health agenda. WHO was created as an international public agency in the service of global health. Recovering and reinforcing this role should be the work of all.

Thank you very much.