

**Opening remarks
Member State briefing on COVID-19
WHO HQ, Geneva
23 July 2020**

Honourable Ministers, Excellencies, dear colleagues and friends,

Thank you for joining us. Today we'll be hearing about the experiences of Mauritius, the Czech Republic and Nicaragua.

And in line with the resolution on the COVID-19 response adopted at the World Health Assembly in May, we will update you on WHO's work to accelerate the development and equitable distribution of vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics through the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator, also known as the ACT Accelerator.

Since the launch of the ACT Accelerator at the end of April, this landmark global initiative has garnered tremendous momentum and mobilized international partners and a diversity of stakeholders.

We offer our appreciation to all actors engaged in the work of the ACT Accelerator.

The last three months have been the startup phase.

We have focused on three main areas of work:

First, setting up the technical areas to develop essential health products to stop COVID-19 and facilitating coherence and the coordination of efforts.

Second, garnering the start-up financing. I would like to express my continued appreciation to the European Commission and President Ursula Von der Leyen for her leadership in galvanizing the pledging events to support the ACT Accelerator.

Third, working to ensure equitable access and the effective and efficient distribution of products, grounded in science and global allocation frameworks.

We have engaged regularly with Member States to advance this critical piece of work.

While these workstreams advanced, it also gave us an opportunity to rapidly learn lessons to optimize the support structures needed to best facilitate the work of the ACT Accelerator.

Through broad consultation, we now have a better sense of what is needed to help guide the Accelerator into the next phase.

The proposed ACT Accelerator facilitation council is a product of all these important lessons and inputs.

It will assist in addressing key strategic, policy financial issues, and actively engage at the highest levels, to advocate for and mobilize the resources needed for the ACT Accelerator to deliver.

We are exploring a composition of countries for the facilitation council based on founding countries, regional groupings, market shapers, and major product producing countries.

We'll be hearing more details from Dr Bruce Aylward on the principles and ways of working that are being proposed, and next

week we should be able to bring an approach forward for your guidance.

Next, I would like to give you a brief update on critical issues in the pandemic response.

I would like to draw your attention to a new study in The Lancet by some of the world's leading nutrition experts that estimates that in this year alone, the pandemic could lead to more than 10,000 child deaths per month.

Food, social service and economic systems have been upended by the pandemic.

Combined with some of the responses to the pandemic itself, such as school closures, trade restrictions, and country lockdowns, this is dealing a devastating blow to already struggling communities.

Together with the Executive Director of UNICEF, the Director-General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, and the Executive Director of the World Food Programme, we are calling upon the world to provide US\$2.4 billion to protect these children from debilitating wasting and death.

The pandemic is also expected to drastically increase other forms of child malnutrition, including stunting, micronutrient deficiencies, and overweight.

As a global community, we must act now to prevent the devastating long-term consequences of hunger and malnutrition for our children and for all of our futures.

This is a preventable tragedy.

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Now, let me turn to some other critical issues as we combat the spread of the pandemic.

More than 16.5 million cases have now been reported to WHO, and more than 650,000 deaths.

If we look into those numbers, there are some important lessons.

Critically, half of all cases globally are in the top three countries, and half of all deaths are in the top four countries.

So although we are dealing with a global pandemic, not all countries are experiencing large, uncontrolled outbreaks.

While facing an unprecedented global challenge, we should also have cause for hope.

We know that taking the right actions works.

The basic measures needed to suppress transmission and save lives remain the same: find, isolate, test and care for cases; and trace and quarantine their contacts.

Keep your distance from others, clean your hands, avoid crowded and enclosed areas, and use a mask.

Where these measures are followed, cases go down. Where they are not, cases go up.

Countries and communities that have followed this advice carefully and consistently have done well.

It is never too late. Even major epidemics can be turned around.

I want to emphasize again that while lockdowns can help take the heat out of an epidemic, they are not the answer on their own.

They only reduce outbreaks to a manageable level so other public health measures can be taken.

And of course, underlying all of the comprehensive actions to manage COVID-19 is the fundamental pillar of informing, engaging and listening to communities.

As we mark six months since the declaration of this global health emergency, the COVID-19 pandemic is illustrating that health is not a reward for development, it's the foundation of social, economic and political stability, and we're learning that the hard way.

We are not prisoners of the pandemic. The future is in our hands.

I thank you.