

WHO Director-General's closing remarks at the World Health Summit: Moving into the Future: Making the Political Choice for Health - 18 October 2022

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Your Excellency Dr Tobias Lindner,

Your Excellency Thomas Steffen,

Your Excellency Dr Carla Vizzotti,

Excellencies, my good friend and brother Axel Pries, dear colleagues and friends,

We have come to the end of another World Health Summit.

I offer my deep gratitude to the government and people of Germany for their hospitality.

I also extend my profound appreciation to Axel and your team for your partnership over many months as we prepared for the summit.

I thank my many colleagues at WHO, who have worked tirelessly to make this event a success,

especially Gaudenz, Bruno, Carmen and the rest of your team.

And I thank the staff of the Hotel Berlin Central District, who have done an outstanding job in accommodating such a large event.

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I'm sure that like me, you are tired but invigorated by what you have seen and heard over the past two days;

By connecting with friends and colleagues, old and new;

And by the level of commitment and energy we have seen for promoting and protecting the health of the world's people.

This afternoon's successful polio pledging event, with commitments of US\$2.6 billion, puts us on the road to the final eradication of only the second human disease in the history of our species. These funds will make a massive difference to our efforts to get rid of polio for good.

Thank you to all the donors who contributed today, and to BMZ for organising and hosting today's pledging.

We're also very grateful to KSRelief for the donation of US\$10 million to support the work of WHO and UNICEF against polio and measles in eight countries.

There have been a number of other important agreements signed and initiatives launched.

Yesterday, WHO launched the Tobacco Cessation Consortium, a business coalition to scale up access to cessation tools, especially in low- and middle-income countries. I was very proud to recognise the work of Dr Bronwyn King – thank you for your leadership.

Just this afternoon we announced the creation of a new global network of chairs of parliamentary health committees, to harness the power of parliaments for universal health coverage, health security, and WHO's work around the world.

We also signed an agreement with the International Association of National Public Health Institutes to strengthen public health services and emergency preparedness globally.

And on Sunday I was delighted to appoint four members of the family of Henrietta Lacks as WHO Goodwill Ambassadors for Cervical Cancer Elimination.

So there is much to celebrate, and many causes for optimism.

But it's not all rosy.

This morning's launch of the progress report on women's, children's and adolescent health shows that although we have made some gains over the last few decades, more recently we are going backwards, and inequalities are widening.

I hope you heard the strong language from former Prime Minister Helen Clark earlier.

And we are all acutely aware of the multiple overlapping crises around the world that are causing preventable death and disease, and depriving people of access to the health services they need.

Even as we meet here in safety and comfort, there are conflicts around the world;

Drought, famine and malnutrition in the Horn of Africa;

Ebola in Uganda;

A severe cholera outbreak in Haiti, and outbreaks in at least 28 other countries this year;

Outbreaks of malaria, dengue, measles and diphtheria in flood-affected parts of Pakistan;

The global monkeypox outbreak;

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic;

And the existential threat of climate change, which is making our planet, on which all life depends, less habitable.

Then there are the crises that don't make the news so often:

Noncommunicable diseases, which are the world's leading causes of premature mortality;

Antimicrobial resistance – a silent pandemic – which threatens to turn back a century of medical progress;

And the fact that almost one third of the world's population lacks access to essential health services.

Even where services are available, almost two billion people experience financial hardship by paying for care out of their own pockets.

The challenges we face can seem overwhelming.

Certainly they are many, they are large, and they are complex. But they are not insurmountable.

In every case, there are solutions, tools and services that can prevent suffering and save lives.

But most importantly, we need to support countries to build resilient health systems, based on the foundation of strong primary health care to deliver those tools and services.

That means putting countries and communities in the driver's seat, so that people get the services they say they need, not what others tell them they should have.

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Late last night I was celebrating a colleague's birthday after a long but productive day.

Someone asked me what my favourite song was.

I said Imagine, by John Lennon.

I remember hearing it for the first time as a high-school student in the 1970s, and feeling inspired by his vision of a better world.

That vision has stayed with me.

And it's the vision of a healthier world that inspires me still.

You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one.

In fact, I think I'm in a room full of them.

We came to the World Health Summit because we dream of a healthier world, in which people can breathe clean air, drink safe water, eat healthy food and live in conditions that promote health, rather than destroy it;

We dream of a safer world, in which all countries and communities are better able to prepare for, prevent, detect and respond to outbreaks, epidemics and pandemics;

And we dream of a fairer world, in which in which no one misses out on the health services they need because of who they are, where they live, or what they earn.

That is the world for which I and my colleagues at WHO will continue to work every single day.

Because health is not a luxury, it's a fundamental human right – an end in itself, a means to development.

I might not say it well, but I will keep saying it: Gesundheit ist ein Menschenrecht!

Vielen dank, thank you so much and see you next year, but before I leave the floor, please give big applause to my friend and brother, Professor Axel Pries and his team.