

Video message

WHO: 75 years of striving for Health For All

World Health Summit - Berlin, Germany

16 October 2023

Your Excellency Karl Lauterbach,

Your Excellency Stella Kyriakides,

Dear colleagues and friends,

Greetings from Manila, and apologies I can't be with you in person today.

We meet in troubling times, in a troubled world; a time of conflict and crisis, when the fabric of multilateralism is frayed, and its very future is questioned.

And yet this is a time that shows why cooperation between countries is so important, and why a forum like the World Health Summit is so important, for bringing people together from around the world to find shared solutions to shared health threats.

Indeed, it was in the aftermath of the Second World War that the nations of the world, came together to form the United Nations and the World Health Organization.

They recognised that the only alternative to global conflict was global cooperation.

Since 1948, the world has achieved great gains in public health.

Average life expectancy globally has increased from 46 to 73 years, with the biggest gains in the poorest countries.

The ancient scourge of smallpox has been eradicated, and the world is on the verge of eradicating polio.

42 countries have eliminated malaria.

In the past 20 years, the global smoking rate has fallen by one third, and rates of maternal and infant mortality have halved.

The list goes on.

But we still face enormous challenges: some old, some new.

We continue to face vast inequities in access to health services, between and within countries;

COVID-19 has exposed major gaps in the world's defences against epidemics, pandemics and other health emergencies;

And the health of billions of people is under threat from conflict, air pollution and the climate crisis, and aggressively-marketed products that harm health.

All these challenges show why the world needs a strong WHO now more than ever.

WHO faces its own challenges. The world's expectations of WHO have increased substantially, but our resources have not.

The global health architecture has become more complex; and increasingly we face the challenge of being a technical organization operating in a political and politicised world.

75 years since our founding, WHO remains central to the global health architecture, as the only international health organization that is representative of all countries, and governed by countries.

WHO is the world's health organization – the place where countries come together to find shared solutions to shared threats.

That's why today and every day, WHO will keep working with countries and communities all over the world in pursuit of our founding vision: the highest possible standard of health, for all people.

I thank you.

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