UN Task Force on NCDs:
Roadmap for joint action across the Government and UN system to support Zambia tackle noncommunicable diseases

Lusaka, 9 December 2016 – The United Nations Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) visited Zambia from 5-9 December to support the African country’s efforts to tackle noncommunicable diseases and road traffic injuries. Ten UN system agencies participated in the joint programming mission.¹ This was the first time that road traffic injuries were included in a UN NCD Task Force country mission since ECOSOC widened the Task Force’s scope of work to include all NCD-related SDGs.

Road traffic injuries and their associated impacts constitute an important health and development challenge in Zambia. Road crashes are the third leading cause of death in Zambia after malaria and HIV/AIDS, accounting for 2000 deaths per year, with many thousands being injured through the road traffic accidents each year. Zambia is one of the most dangerous in the world when it comes to road safety.

NCDs - principally cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancers, and chronic respiratory diseases cause 23% of all deaths in the country with nearly 1 in 5 people dying prematurely from these conditions. 24% of Zambian men smoke and more than a third of men have hypertension. The mission was timed in order to hold discussions on a new multisectoral NCD action plan.

During the visit, the Task Force met with high-level officials from a number of ministries across government in order to explain how NCDs present a challenge to their sector and the national development agenda and to identify concrete steps that can be taken in their sector to tackle NCDs. The Task Force also met with parliamentarians as well as development partners, representatives of civil society and academia in addition.

The Joint Mission also reviewed Zambian achievements against the WHO NCD Progress Monitor 2015 and commitments sets out in the Outcome Document of the 2014 High-level Meeting on NCDs.

The Task Force held detailed discussions with the First Lady of Zambia, who had participated in the Friends of the Task Force meeting during the UN General Assembly in September 2016. The First Lady was clear when she spoke in New York of the need to tackle NCDs if the hard fought gains on

HIV/AIDS were not to be lost. Discussions in Lusaka focussed on practical steps that the First Lady and her office could take to support on the ground action on NCDs.

The Joint Mission also reviewed Zambian achievements against the WHO NCD Progress Monitor 2015 and commitments sets out in the Outcome Document of the 2014 High-level Meeting on NCDs.

The Joint Mission reviewed the draft UN Development Partnership Framework for 2016-2021 with UN agencies in country, noting that NCD-related SDGs are an integral part of the Framework and discussed the contributions that resident UN agencies can make in providing technical support to the Government of Zambia.

Mrs Janet Rogan UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Zambia was clear that the UN system as a whole had an important role to play in supporting Zambia tackle NCDs, “we are seeing that noncommunicable diseases are no longer a problem for older generations – the rising incidence of obesity, overweight and diabetes, particularly among the young is testament to that” she said. Ms Rogan highlighted the multisectoral nature of NCDs, the urgent need for the UN top step up action to support the development and implementation of the government’s new multisectoral NCD action plan, concluding that a “business as usual” attitude will prevent Zambia attaining the NCD-related Sustainable Development Goals.

A road map for action in Zambia is currently being finalized by the Joint Mission in order to ensure that Zambia is well placed to report at the Third High-level Meeting on NCDs in 2018.