First WHO Global Ministerial Conference
Ending TB in the Sustainable Development Era: A Multisectoral Response

Welcome Remarks by

Dr Zsuzsanna Jakab
WHO Regional Director for Europe

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Honourable Minister Veronika Skvortsova, Minister of Health of the Russian Federation,
Honourable Ministers,
Esteemed Director-General, Dr Tedros, dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the WHO Regional Office for Europe, it is my pleasure to join WHO Director General, Dr Tedros, in expressing our deepest gratitude to the Government of the Russian Federation for hosting the First Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Tuberculosis in the Sustainable Development Era. It is particularly important to note that this first ever Global Ministerial Conference on TB is taking place in the Russian Federation, which underscores the country’s longstanding history of TB prevention and care, its close collaboration with WHO through its High-Level Working Group mechanism and the country’s remarkable 22% reduction in TB rates over the last five years.

In 2010, our region endorsed the Consolidated Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Multidrug- and Extensively Drug-resistant Tuberculosis 2011–2015. Through implementation of this plan, approximately one million patients were cured, 26 million lives saved, 200 000 MDR-TB cases averted and seven billion US dollars saved.
With long-term investment and active partnership, the WHO European Region has experienced a 4.3% annual decrease in TB rates and an 8.5% annual decrease in TB mortality in the last five years, which are the fastest declines among all WHO regions. With the introduction of molecular diagnostic techniques, detection of MDR-TB has more than doubled, from 30% in 2011 to 63% in 2015. Thanks to universal access to MDR-TB treatment, in several countries, MDR-TB rates and absolute numbers have been decreasing.

Despite these achievements, we face significant challenges. Across the Region, MDR-TB treatment success has only slightly increased from 46% in 2011 to 55% in 2015. In addition, ours is the only region with an increasing number of new HIV infections, with more than 150 000 new infections in 2016, contributing to more than 2.4 million people currently estimated to be living with HIV. As a result, since 2011, TB/HIV coinfection has been soaring by an average of 6.2% annually.

To address these challenges, and in line with the global End TB Strategy, our region has adopted the Tuberculosis Action Plan for the WHO European Region 2016–2020. If the plan is fully implemented, we could save 3.1 million lives by 2020. The targets we have set are ambitious, as we strive to reduce new TB rates by 25%, decrease TB deaths by 35% and increase treatment success rates among MDR-TB patients to at least 75%. I am convinced that together, and with strong political commitment and close collaboration, we can make this happen. Successful implementation of the plan depends on securing adequate resources and their efficient use. With the reduction of external funding, including that from the Global Fund, countries need to increase their domestic resources.

In order to leave no one behind, any policy or action must be embedded in strong and resilient health systems. I am proud to highlight that our region is advancing strongly on reforms to link disease control and health systems resilience, and ensuring people-centred care for better health outcomes. As an example of achievements in this area, Armenia and Belarus will share their experiences during tomorrow’s panel on Sufficient and Sustainable Financing. This progress is also very much in line with the Alma Ata Declaration on primary health care, whose 40th anniversary we will celebrate next year at a global conference, generously hosted by the Ministry of Health of Kazakhstan.
In the diverse economic, social and health systems’ context of the WHO European Region, concrete national and local actions are required in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals to address inequities. These tailored actions should result in beneficial change to the lives of people suffering from TB, by ensuring early diagnosis and full treatment. In this way, we can break the transmission cycle and address the root causes of the disease. Such an approach calls for full engagement of all involved, including civil society and patients themselves. For this reason, I welcome the opportunity at this conference to further discuss the socioeconomic determinants and other conditions, such as noncommunicable diseases, and agree on measures to address them.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As before, you may count on our close collaboration with all partners and stakeholders, in the fight against TB. As TB is a global health problem, I would like to emphasize that this conference should be considered an excellent platform to explore and expand interregional collaboration to end TB together.

As the outcome of this Ministerial Conference will inform the UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting on TB in 2018, we are all in the right place and at the right moment in history to develop solutions that will free the world from TB.

In this spirit, I wish us a fruitful and successful conference, full of inspiration, groundbreaking thoughts and innovative actions.

Thank you very much