STATEMENT TO THE CIVIL SOCIETY HEARING – HLM3 Non-Communicable Diseases

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

This statement is made on behalf of the Academy of Dentistry International, a global network of over 3000 oral and other health professionals in more than 80 nations around the globe dedicated to the improvement in the oral health and quality of life for citizens of every nation. As an international honor society, we uniquely serve the oral and general health needs of peoples throughout the world as a priority and advocate for the 2030 Agenda – transforming our world: the SDGs, rather than the needs and personal interests of members.

The Global Burden of Disease Studies report that untreated dental decay in permanent teeth is the single most prevalent disease on the planet, severe chronic periodontal (gum and underlying bone) disease the sixth most prevalent and untreated decay in deciduous (‘milk’) teeth the 12th most prevalent. The economic burden is severe. The indirect costs, such as time away from school and work, amount to more than US$140 billion per year, ranking the indirect costs of oral diseases among the top 10 causes of death. Untreated oral diseases disrupt a child’s education and development including growth. As such policy implications of these conditions should extend beyond ministries of health to ministries of education (waste of educational resources) and ministries of commerce and development (less developed workforce). These diseases are almost entirely preventable through reductions in risk factors common to other NCDs, and simple and low-cost technologies.

Oral diseases are linked to diabetes, heart disease and stroke, and pre-term low birthweight babies among other conditions. Common risk factors include sugar, tobacco, alcohol, hygiene and safe water, and injury prevention. There is a clear social gradient to the inequalities in oral health, and the social determinants for oral diseases are common to many other NCDs. Treatments for these NCDs and other conditions, for example cancer, will be compromised though poor nutrition consequent to poor oral function. Choking to death and inhalational pneumonia also are rooted in poor oral function and a compromised dentition.

The Academy of Dentistry International calls on all Member States to recognize oral diseases as

(1) major social, economic and developmental burdens on society and national development
(2) an indicator of common risk factors predisposing to other NCDs
(3) largely preventable through tough actions
   a. against added and non-intrinsic sugars in all forms, including taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages
   b. against the use of all forms of tobacco
   c. including access to
      i. safe water for use in daily oral hygiene practices
      ii. appropriate availability and use of fluoride agents such a toothpaste and drinking water.