Interactive Hearing as part of the preparatory process toward the third High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on NCDs

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Your Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, President of the General Assembly, Representatives of the Permanent Missions, colleagues in public health, ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Svetlana Axelrod and I am the WHO’s Assistant-Director General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health.

I am extremely pleased to be here today on behalf of WHO’s Director-General, Dr Tedros.

Dr Tedros sends his apologies for not being able to be here himself.

We have a very important task before us at this interactive hearing.

Over the past several years, countries have committed themselves to action against NCDs.

And indeed, some progress has been made.

But not nearly enough.

Most countries, especially low- and middle-income ones, simply cannot implement the agreed actions.

There are many reasons for this, lack of financial resources being a major one.

We know that domestic resources should be the mainstay of NCDs action.
However, many countries need catalytic funding to accelerate this work.

Countries also need

- technical support,
- capacity building,
- a skilled workforce,
- ways to build on established programmes,
- and plans for integrating NCDs into national action plans and into the development of universal health coverage.

NCDs are on the rise around the world.

What we are doing now is not enough.

At our current rate of progress, the world will not meet the NCDs target in SDG 3.

That target, in SDG 3.4, is to reduce by one-third premature mortality from NCDs by 2030, through prevention and treatment, and to promote mental health and well-being.

This target is extremely important.

It is important, in my view, because it includes prevention.

Likewise, it acknowledges the importance of mental health, which has often been overlooked in the NCDs agenda, despite the high prevalence of mental disorders.

The challenges NCDs pose can be addressed only if there is strong commitment and enlightened leadership from the highest levels of government.

Governments—and by this, I mean Heads of State and Government, as the High-level Commission on NCDs has recommended—

must act on their pledges to prevent NCDs in the first place, and ensure that people can obtain the services they need for treatment.

Failure to implement the NCDs agenda will result in massive costs to individuals and communities.
It is in direct opposition to the world’s commitment to sustainable development and to achieving the SDGs.

This is the context of today’s hearing and it is one that you all know well.

It is crystal clear that combatting NCDs cannot be left to the health sector alone. This is a multi-sectoral problem, and there must be a multi-sectoral response.

NCDs, their risk factors and the economic, market, and commercial factors that influence them cut across health, agriculture, finance, trade, and many other sectors.

Further, WHO alone cannot provide the support needed to combat this global epidemic.

We must have the involvement of civil society, the private sector, academia, and philanthropy.

Many of you here today represent a wide cross-section of these Non-State Actors. You are absolutely critical to implementing action against NCDs.

We need your best and most innovative ideas.

We need your out-of-the-box thinking for all of the topics listed in the four panels. I am sure this will be a very rich discussion.

Let’s find creative, feasible ways to turn talk into action.