Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to this plenary session on preventing the Chronic Disease Pandemic.

I am Catherine le Gales-Camus, the Assistant Director General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health.

I would like to welcome the wide range of distinguished representatives here today from Member States, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, academia and the private sector. Thank you for your interest and participation in this important issue. We are truly taking the spirit of partnership to heart at the very first session of the Forum.

There is a ferocious global pandemic raging in every corner of the planet. There is not one country, not a community, and scarcely a family left untouched. It does not discriminate for age, race, gender or income. It must, and can, be stopped.

This is the chronic disease pandemic. Heart disease, stroke, cancer, chronic respiratory disease and diabetes are the major killers. According to WHO’s latest estimate, these and other chronic diseases will account for 35 million deaths this year from the total 58 million deaths globally, or more than double all other causes.

For this reason, WHO has produced a global report, entitled Preventing Chronic Diseases: a vital investment.

I am pleased to formally present it for the first time to you, our Member States and partners, on behalf of WHO and the department of Chronic Diseases and Health Promotion which has produced it.

This report will serve as the cornerstone of a global movement to address chronic diseases as a health priority. As you will see when you read it, it gives a global perspective and projections for this rising pandemic and alarming news about the economic impact. Additionally, it tells a number of very compelling stories of individuals who have suffered from chronic diseases and the toll their disease has taken. It also provides very practical and effective solutions and a framework for action.

But before we begin to implement solutions, we must address the fact that we have not been acting on the true size, scope and reach of this pandemic. We must come face to face with chronic disease.

(to video)
Stopping the global pandemic of chronic disease must move forward on an urgent basis. As we have seen, millions of people depend on it for their lives, to relieve their suffering, and to avert the economic and personal toll this epidemic is reaping. Not to mention the burden it is increasingly placing on already strained health systems.

It is very appropriate that the theme of this forum is Partnership because that is the key to success. It is going to take a new approach, new thinking and leadership. We need leadership from national governments, with support and action from international organizations, academia, civil society and the private sector. This is crucial because many of the major determinants of chronic diseases lie outside the health sector. No single organization or group has the resources to address the complex public health issues related to the prevention of chronic diseases.

The WHO Forum will explore these issues in detail over the next three days, beginning this morning with a panel discussion we hope will serve as a model of the sort of approach, engagement and leadership needed.

We will hear from our panellists, each of whom will be introduced presently and whom I would like to thank for their participation. They span the breadth of chronic disease issues and have experience working in partnership to prevent chronic diseases. We look forward to learning from their experiences, using them to strengthen our collective action to stop the global pandemic of chronic disease and save millions of lives.

But first, please let me introduce Dr Robert Beaglehole, Director of Chronic Diseases and Health Promotion for WHO, and the editor in chief of the report, to give us more insight into its findings and vision for the future.