It is a great pleasure to be among all of you this morning. I really feel as though I am among old friends here. You are a truly remarkable group of people. I never cease to be impressed by the way you have mobilized to put accountability right at the center of the agenda for women’s, children’s – and adolescents’ health.

I’d like to extend a special thank you to the Governments of South Africa and Denmark for hosting this event, to the UN Secretary-General as senior co-chair of Every Woman Every Child, to the Chair of PMNCH, Mrs Graça Machel, and finally, to the Independent Accountability Panel and in particular co-Chairs, Carmen Barroso and Kul Gautam for their leadership and for the thought-provoking report being launched today.

And I’d like to make three points.
First, we are at a ‘never-before’ moment for adolescent health. For years, the unique health issues associated with adolescence have been poorly understood or, in some cases, ignored. But we know more today about the health of adolescents than ever before. Adolescence is a time when we face unique vulnerabilities, and a period that is crucial in our development into healthy, productive adults.

Over 3000 adolescents die every day, two thirds of them in low- and middle-income countries in Africa and South-East Asia.

And they tend to die from different causes, depending whether they are boys or girls. The leading cause of death for 10 to 14 year old girls are respiratory infections, such as pneumonia – thanks to the pollution created by cooking with dirty fuels. Older girls die from pregnancy complications, such as haemorrhage, sepsis and complications from unsafe abortions.

Boys, however, die mostly from road injuries, and interpersonal violence. Conflict is adding to the number of boys dying violent deaths.
And both boys and girls experience mental health problems. Self-harm is another leading cause of adolescent death.

As a parent, this never ceases to shock me.

This brings me to my second point: most adolescent deaths can be prevented with good health services, education and social support.

So I welcome the IAP recommendations and in particular recommendation number four: making universal health coverage work for all adolescents. As Director-General of WHO, Universal Health Coverage is my top priority. Put simply, UHC means that all individuals receive the quality health services they need, when they need them, without suffering financial hardship.

It means making sure adolescents can access contraception or other sexual and reproductive health services without third party consent. It means they can get care for mental health issues and get the information they need to develop healthy lifestyle habits. And it means
services are high-quality and designed with adolescents’ real needs in mind - ideally with inputs from adolescents themselves.

And third, I want to stress the importance of accountability, As Director-General of WHO, Member States have requested that I report regularly on progress towards women’s, children’s and adolescents’ health. I will honor that obligation.

Lastly, I want to emphasize the need for us each to deliver on our own specific mandates and use our own particular expertise. And I want to reiterate the importance of aligning properly to deliver together. In this context I would like to appreciate the role of the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health, and reinforce WHO’s commitment to the H6 and its all-important work in countries. We have heard the call for the H6 to accelerate progress towards universal health coverage. We will act on that call. I promise.

Thank you.