

# WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

## COMMONWEALTH MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

I am pleased to be here in my capacity as the Chair of the 2017 Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting here in Geneva on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> May.

The theme of the meeting was *'Sustainable Financing of Universal Health Coverage as an Essential Component for Global Security including the Reduction of All Forms of Violence'*, which is complementary to this year's WHA theme.

Commonwealth Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to universal health coverage (UHC) as a critical component of sustainable development; a key element of reducing social inequities; a building block to health security; and, as an essential component in the response to the urgent multi-sectoral challenges of global security, including the multiple causes of anti-microbial resistance and epidemic of violence.

Commonwealth Ministers agreed that UHC offers the best chance of improving the health outcomes of Commonwealth citizens; of addressing the global threats of both communicable and non-communicable diseases, which are a leading cause of death and disability in many regions of the Commonwealth; and maternal and child mortality rates which are still unacceptably high in many parts of the Commonwealth; and, ensuring preparedness for pandemics and other health emergencies as well as mitigating the effect of climate change which is threatening well-being, health infrastructure, food security, nutrition and causing socio-economic devastation.

We noted that UHC has to be country-owned. It must be locally tailored to each country's culture, available resources and the expectations of citizens. Engaging all stakeholders and improving the entire health system are also essential for moving towards UHC, and in addressing the risk factors for ill health.

We also reaffirmed our commitment to collaborate, noting the effectiveness of systems of pooled procurement and the supply of medicines and vaccines, health technologies and well-functioning digital health systems; as well as collective action in addressing cervical cancer and avoidable blindness in the Commonwealth. Besides the opportunity to share experiences, lessons, and best practices in this regard, we welcomed the opportunity to explore possibilities for collaborative action across the Commonwealth.

Recognising the centrality of a rights based approach to UHC, we accepted UHC as a means to realise the 'right to the highest attainable standard of health', as well as a means to ensure vulnerable groups are not left behind, in relation to access to healthcare and socio-economic development.

Sustainable financing for health is a critical factor in progress towards UHC, particularly in low and middle-income countries and is vital to accelerating progress towards UHC. It is of importance to note the financial and human resource challenges of achieving UHC, particularly in low-resource environments and in the context of the brain drain of healthcare workers.

The theme for the 2018 Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting is: "Enhancing the global fight against NCDs; raising awareness, mobilising resources and ensuring accessibility to universal coverage."

I invite member countries to view the full ministerial statement that is available on the Commonwealth Secretariat Website.