



WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY 74th Session (virtual)
(24 May 2021)

“Ending this pandemic, preventing the next: building together a healthier, safer and fair world”
(General discussion under Agenda Item 3)

Mr. President,
Dr Tedros, Director General, WHO
Honorable Ministers,
Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

COVID-19 is a crisis of unparalleled dimensions in modern history. It has revealed systemic gaps and vulnerabilities in health systems globally to handle an epidemic or pandemic.

The pandemic has also disrupted economies and livelihoods in an unprecedented manner. Yet, the people and countries with modest resources have been hit the hardest, exacerbating their pre-pandemic public health and socio-economic vulnerabilities.

Putting an end to this deadly pandemic and preventing the future ones requires an accelerated level of international cooperation. This necessitates enhanced financing for development and removal of structural impediments to drive production of affordable medicines, diagnostics and vaccines, both as a means to end this pandemic quickly, stop the next one and to achieve the universal health coverage goal by 2030.

The global fight against COVID-19 and its variants has however been hampered by the unequal and slow pace of vaccine distribution and supply, threatening lives, particularly in developing countries.

The COVAX Facility has made a positive contribution. However, it has had to confront challenges of stoppage or inordinate delays. Even as the developed countries succeeded in procuring vaccines quickly, at times above their needs, developing countries continue to encounter vaccine shortages.

Mr. President,



It is essential to urgently overcome the huge gap between demand and supply of COVID vaccines. Similarly, immediate redistribution of vaccines from high income countries to low and middle-income countries is required. Filling these gaps is an essential part of the solution, but not the only solution. The throes of the pandemic require urgent removal of undue restrictions on intellectual property rights and early waiver of patents to accelerate production of vaccines and medicines. We welcome the US and EU announcements in this context and look forward to an early formalization at the WTO.

Mr. President,

In Pakistan, we maintained an integrated response to mitigate the socio-economic and public health impacts of the pandemic. We put together an efficient governance structure to monitor, coordinate and respond to the pandemic through a National Command and Operation Centre. On the socio-economic front, we launched one of the most comprehensive social protection initiatives, the Ehsaas Emergency Cash (EEC) programme and delivered approximately US\$ 1.1 billion to 14.8 million families in most need.

The World Bank has recognized the Ehsaas Emergency Cash among top four social protection interventions globally in terms of number of people covered. This programme is not just a short-term relief, but will be an important component of the redesign of social protection, post COVID-19.

Despite delays in vaccine supplies and procurements, we have vaccinated *5.2 million people by 21 May 2021*. Through a combination of smart lockdowns, public awareness programme, testing and ramping up of inoculations, we have successfully minimized the fallout from the second and the third wave but also the impact of new variants entering into the country from foreign sources. We nevertheless remain vigilant and are taking measures to prevent the transmission of virus and its variants.

Mr. President,

In the middle of every challenge lies an opportunity. COVID-19 represents an opportunity to adopt new approaches and enhance solutions to achieve healthier and more resilient people, societies and economies. The global focus on public health is propitious.

Recent reports by the Independent Panel, the Review Committee on IHR, and WHO Oversight and Advisory Committee have made useful recommendations to strengthen global



defences against future threats. These recommendations require the attention they deserve by the WHO and its Member States.

In our interconnected world, the founding principles of the WHO are all the more relevant. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standards of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without discrimination. Let us re-affirm our commitment to ensure a safer, equitable and effective international health system that is fully equipped to prevent future pandemics and achieve the goal of universal health coverage by the end of this decade.
