

Opening remarks**10th WHO-WIPO-WTO Trilateral Symposium: *Facing the future: human health and climate change*****Organisers: WHO-WIPO-WTO (Hosted by WHO this year)****WHO HQ – Geneva, Switzerland****14 November 2023**

Mr. Ambrosio Yobanolo del Real, Vice-Chair of the Technology Executive Committee of the UNFCCC

Director-General Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala,

Director-General Daren Tang,

Dear colleagues and friends,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the 10th Trilateral Technical Symposium, as we discuss our collective, cross-sectoral efforts to address the challenges of human health and the climate crisis.

I thank you, Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Director-General Daren Tang, for your leadership and partnership.

The climate crisis is a health crisis. The most pressing reasons for urgent climate action are the impacts not in the future, but right now, on health.

In the last year, the world has suffered record temperatures across Europe and Asia; drought, food insecurity and malnutrition in the Horn of Africa; wildfires and deadly spikes in air pollution across North America.

Thousands of lives have been lost.

This is only the beginning.

We have seen an increase in the geographical spread of vector-borne diseases such as dengue and malaria, while rising sea levels will eventually make whole nations uninhabitable.

This is all happening with a global temperature increase of only about one degree centigrade.

I am very concerned by the UN Environment Programme's new projections showing that countries will burn double the amount of fossil fuels than would be needed to limit warming to 1.5 degrees centigrade by 2030.

The UN Secretary General has been very clear – continued expansion of fossil fuel production is 'incompatible with human survival.'

WHO's position is equally clear. As I have said before – from a health point of view, the world's addiction to fossil fuels is an act of self-harm.

This addiction not only drives the climate crisis, but is a major contributor to the air pollution which kills almost seven million people every year – a death every five seconds.

The health community has a critical role to play in protecting people from the escalating climate threats to health.

We also have a role in mitigation.

Health is a powerful motivator for cleaner sources of energy, more sustainable and healthy diets, and greener and more liveable cities.

Health systems also contribute about 5% of greenhouse gas emissions.

We have a dual responsibility to build health systems that can withstand climate shocks, while at the same time reducing their carbon footprint.

Just last week, WHO published a new operational framework for building climate resilient and low-carbon health systems.

It provides a clear path forward for health systems to protect communities in an ever-changing climate, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to the achievement of global health goals.

This will be a cornerstone of WHO's support to countries, and of the partnership that we lead through the Alliance for Transformative Action on Climate and Health.

Now more than ever, in the context of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, a change of paradigm is needed, recognizing the intrinsic value of nature, and its role as the ultimate source of all human health.

The window of opportunity to act is rapidly closing.

Let me highlight three priorities.

Firstly, we need a more ambitious and positive vision for the future we want, to position health as a central motivation for more ambitious climate action.

In less than three weeks' time, the world's leaders will gather at the COP28 in Dubai. This will see the first ever "Health Day", and climate and health ministerial meeting, at a climate change COP.

It is urgent that we advocate with our Member States to honour and accelerate their commitments to reduce emissions and transition to clean energy.

Secondly, we need more and better targeted investment.

Currently, the world is not meeting the agreed target of 100 billion US dollars a year in climate finance.

At the same time, Governments are spending over a trillion US dollars a year – ten times as much - in subsidizing fossil fuel consumption.

And even given the modest amount of climate finance that has been made available – only about 1% goes to protecting human health.

We need to start putting people's health and lives at the centre of investment plans.

Finally, we need to advance technologies that protect both human life and the planet, and we need trade arrangements that allow these to reach as many people as possible.

This includes everything from the roll out of cheap and clean renewable energy to power healthcare facilities, particularly in poor communities; to more energy efficient medical devices, and greater use of digital medicine, to reduce our environmental impact.

This type of cross-sectoral work is what makes our trilateral collaboration so important.

In the same way that we have been fighting for global equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines, we need to ensure that intellectual property and trade rules are not a barrier to accessing greener and healthier technologies.

WHO will continue working closely in these fields with WIPO, WTO, the UNFCCC, other stakeholders – and most importantly our Member States - to guide innovation and trade in the service of a more sustainable and healthier future for all.

I thank you.