

**Statement by Frederique Santerre, PhD
Merck Group KGaA
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Welcome and thank you. My name is Frederique Santerre. I am pleased to address today's Ministerial Session of the UN High-Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth. I speak on behalf of the Merck Group, a leading innovative medicines, life science and technology company, where I serve as Global Head of Access to Health.

Merck was founded in Germany nearly 350 years ago, in 1668. As the oldest, and family-owned, pharmaceutical company, we carry a long tradition of finding new ways to improve the health and life of people around the world.

As a major employer in a diverse range of health, life sciences and high-technology businesses, Merck is honoured to serve as a private-sector stakeholder as the Commission prepares to implement the 10 recommendations on health employment agreed at the UN General Assembly on September 20th. We have read with interest the Five-Year Action Plan just released in conjunction with today's meeting and welcome the opportunity to further contribute to the consultative process both in terms of ideas around game-changing multi-stakeholders initiatives and our contribution to 5 immediate actions.

The Merck Group commends the Plan as a major investor in human capital; and as an employer, educator and advocate for community-based health services, where women play a vital role.

Like others in the biopharmaceutical industry, we do not just make medicines. Our capabilities extend to that "last mile" in the drug delivery supply chain, where human, on-the-ground interventions – often in difficult logistical situations and remote geographical locations – succeed in timely delivering health solutions directly at the bedside of patients who need them. I also point to the partnering Merck and the industry do with governments, NGOs and other stakeholders in introducing new service delivery models focused on the patient. These new models cover activities "beyond the pill" such as disease awareness and education; promotion of patient adherence to therapy; community-based population health programs, including health literacy, prevention and wellness; capacity building; and clinical training and guidelines for accurate physician diagnosis and treatment.



Executing on these programs is creating significant employment opportunities. It represents a growing source of technology and know-how transfers between industrial and emerging developing countries.

The benefits to patients, communities and society are widespread, reinforcing what we do in the laboratory in developing new health solutions for major diseases. To advance this work, Merck alone employs nearly 50,000 colleagues worldwide, with approximately 30 per cent of our employees based in emerging and developing country markets.

Diversity is not just reflective of geography but gender as well – 42 per cent of our workforce is female.

Overall, our industry skill set is world class, with a premium on knowledge workers, among the highest of any sector of business. My company also pays a premium competitive wage in all our country markets, which helps us retain local talent and avoiding the “brain drain” that leads many health workers to leave their native countries and seek better opportunities elsewhere. And statistics show that for every single job our industry creates, six others are created in downstream, health-related functions and activities.

One vital point we all agree on: Health *is* Wealth. This is because healthy populations are more economically productive. Participation in the workforce is higher. Good health also accelerates the “demographic dividend,” where, as fertility rates fall, we see a rise in the proportion of the working age population, which contributes to rising per capita incomes and more funds available for investment in health services. Economists call it the virtuous circle.

This brings me to address how Merck Group proposes to contribute to the 10 Recommendations and 5 Immediate Actions proposed by the Commission in the 2017-2021 Action Plan.

First, with regards to **gender inequality** in the healthcare workforce, Merck is already active through various diversity initiatives and in disease awareness programs that affect the female population – our anemia awareness campaign is one example.

In addition, we commit to extend our efforts to promote health empowerment in developing countries and target female health worker communities specifically going forward.

We will also cooperate with the biopharmaceutical industry’s global trade association, IFPMA, as it launches new initiatives. A women’s health element is sorely needed, and as a member of the IFPMA leadership team, the Merck Group intends to make it happen.

Next, we will seek to join the UN Foundation’s Data2X initiative on gender-based data and welcome other opportunities to support data and evidence strengthening.

Finally, we intend to add our private-sector voice and perspective to the Gender Champions initiative by seeking formal membership to the Network, where engagement by the private sector is limited.



Second, with regards to contributing to the Commission’s work related to **health empowerment**, Merck Group promises to raise awareness about the Commission’s Action Plan and be an intra-industry advocate for relevant parts of the Commission agenda, as this new effort gears up.

We propose to support the planned analysis of health labor force market data by providing more information on how the company contributes to talent development in various countries, particularly in building a diverse workforce with enhanced opportunities for women, at all levels of the organization.

We welcome constructive dialogue and collaborative proposals to “accelerate investment in transformative education, skills and job creation,” and we would be pleased to provide the Commission and its stakeholders our experience in building effective health infrastructure.

Finally, Merck has adopted, through its Charter on access to health in developing countries an end-to-end and tailored approach to health empowerment, focusing on 6 target groups and 5 types of intervention, ranging from medical education to capacity-building in logistics and process infrastructure. Our engagement in this area has been recognized recently by the independent Access to Medicine (ATM) Foundation Index, where we rank 4th among the 20 largest global biopharmaceutical companies.

In conclusion, the Merck group endorses the Commission view that investment in a vibrant and productive health work force is the foundation for sustainable development and social cohesion. Much of this investment will come from the private sector, which I remind members relies on market incentives combined with an equal measure of predictable, rules-based regulation. We value a step-wise approach to the Commission’s forthcoming work program, one based on inclusion, transparent procedures and objective, evidence-driven milestones of performance.

Once more, I’d like to thank the Chair and the Commission’s three host institutions for the opportunity to speak today. The Merck Group looks forward to working with you on this frontline issue in guiding the larger UN SDG agenda to its ultimate destination: better health for all.

