

JOINT STATEMENT: WHO DIRECTOR-GENERAL AND THE CIVIL SOCIETY TASK FORCE ON TB URGENT ACTIONS TO STOP PREVENTABLE DEATHS AND SUFFERING DUE TO TUBERCULOSIS AND RECOVER GAINS LOST DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus held a virtual session with the members of the WHO Civil Society Task Force on Tuberculosis (CSTF-TB) in April 2021, focused on addressing the alarming global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the TB response. The meeting highlighted the need for urgent restoration of essential TB services.

The far-reaching consequences of COVID-19 on access to TB services and on the determinants of TB, including poverty and food security, make it even more pertinent to adopt a multisectoral approach, with engagement of affected communities, and civil society, to stop further declines in case notifications and get on track to end TB. The session was part of the annual meeting of the CSTF-TB with all the three levels of the WHO Global Tuberculosis Programme.

WE THE MEMBERS OF CSTF-TB JOIN THE WHO DIRECTOR-GENERAL IN THIS CALL FOR URGENT ACTION, NOTING THAT:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has severely disrupted access to TB services and is reversing the gains made towards ending TB.
- Latest data collected by WHO from more than 80 countries data indicates that 1.4 million fewer people received care for TB in 2020 than in 2019, a 21% drop in TB notifications over this period. This could lead to an additional half a million TB deaths.
- Global extreme poverty will rise for the first time in over 20 years, according to the World Bank, thereby causing significant increase in undernourishment, a major determinant of TB. This will therefore lead to more suffering and death due to TB if appropriate action is not taken now.

IN THIS JOINT STATEMENT, WE URGE GOVERNMENTS, PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS TO TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION TO:

- **Restore access to essential TB services** to stop the decline in TB diagnosis and care by facilitating and supporting continuation/completion of treatment for those diagnosed with TB through patient-centred approaches including home-based and community-based care models as well as use of digital technologies, and in line with the latest WHO guidelines. This is also critical to stopping further transmission of TB.
- **Harness the multisectoral response to COVID-19** to galvanise and strengthen ongoing multisectoral engagement and action to combat TB, including social protection for people affected by TB, with high level government leadership and active involvement of civil society, affected communities, partners and other stakeholders.

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- **Systematically monitor, promptly analyse and address the impact of COVID-19** on TB services across the continuum of care, in close collaboration with affected communities and civil society.
 - **Leverage domestic and external financial resources**, including funding from the Global Fund and other bilateral and multilateral funding agencies, to introduce and scale-up innovative approaches for provision of TB services, including the use of digital technologies and dual testing for TB and COVID-19, and to strengthen airborne infection control, including procurement of personal protective equipment (PPE) for health workers and community workers involved in TB care and prevention activities.
 - **Fully engage affected communities** and civil society towards responsive, people-centred, rights-based, equitable and stigma-free strategies, to ensure access to TB services by people further disadvantaged as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - **Intensify research and development** to speed up access to new diagnostics, drugs and vaccines. Lessons learnt from COVID-19 vaccine development should be harnessed to accelerate the development of effective vaccines for TB.

WE, THE MEMBERS OF WHO'S CIVIL SOCIETY TASK FORCE ON TB COMMIT TO ACTIVELY WORK IN CLOSE COLLABORATION WITH ALL STAKEHOLDERS UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF WHO TO SUPPORT WHO MEMBER STATES TO IMPLEMENT THE ABOVE COMMITMENTS TO ENSURE THAT PEOPLE WITH TB ARE NOT LEFT BEHIND, THEREBY ACCELERATING PROGRESS TOWARDS MAKING UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE A REALITY.

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WHO's Civil Society Task Force on TB provides a platform for discussion and exchange between WHO and civil society, building on commitment of the WHO Director-General, with emphasis on strengthening collaboration towards accelerating progress to end TB. Its seventeen civil society members, mainly from TB high-burden countries representing all WHO regions reflect diverse interests, skills, and backgrounds.