THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS AT MEDIA BRIEFING ON THE SECRETARY-GENERAL’S HIGH-LEVEL PANEL ON ACCESS TO MEDICINES

Durban, 18 July 2016

Madame Ruth Dreifuss, Co-chair of the High-Level Panel, former President of the Swiss Federation,
Ms. Malebona Precious Matsoso, Member of the High-Level Panel and Director-General: Department of Health of South Africa,
Ms. Lorena Di Giano, Member of the High-Level Panel’s Expert Advisory Group,
Distinguished Panel Members,
Members of the press,

Thank you to our Moderator, Ms. Mandeep Dhaliwal.

I am honoured to be here.

Since today is Nelson Mandela International Day, I want to draw on his wisdom.

Madiba once pointed out that while the AIDS epidemic threatens the fabric of our lives, more money is spent on weapons than on helping people infected by HIV. And he added that, "Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice."

Sixteen years ago, when the AIDS conference was last held in Durban, less than 1 percent of all people living with HIV in poorer countries had access to treatment. Millions died waiting for medicines. Today, more than 17 million people receive treatment.

We can thank many partners for this success.

First: People living with HIV. They are a vivid reminder that health is a fundamental right.

Second: Biomedical companies. They produced medicines that are more effective and less toxic. And we now can diagnose people in twenty minutes or less.

Third: generic medicines. They transformed the AIDS response by cutting costs to just a dollar a day. That brought treatment to millions of people.
Fourth: international finance. Countries came forward with funding, like PEPFAR, the United States President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. Many donor countries have supported the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and malaria.

The world has proven that when we come together, we can transform lives.

But the gains are inadequate – and fragile.

More than half of all people living with HIV still lack access to treatment.

Many people cannot afford the new generation of treatments for AIDS, Hepatitis C and other non-communicable diseases like cancer.

There is not enough research and development on neglected and rare diseases. Tuberculosis is the leading cause of death for people living with HIV – but there have been almost no new medicines to treat it in years.

The bigger health picture is worrying. We are reactively addressing threats like Ebola and Zika. Antimicrobial resistance is a major threat that could kill as many as 10 million people a year by 2050 – if we fail to act.

The world has a blueprint for a better future. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is our ambitious and achievable vision of a life of dignity for all people.

If we want to we want to provide universal health coverage by 2030, we have to break down barriers to treatment. And we need to develop treatments for tuberculosis, neglected tropical diseases and other unmet needs.

I established the High-Level Panel on Access to Medicines to address these issues. I have asked it to make recommendations for a coherent set of policies that addresses the rights of inventors, international human rights law, trade rules and public health.

I thank former presidents Ruth Dreifuss of Switzerland and Festus Mogae of Botswana for their leadership. I am confident that the 16 panel members will bring their best energy and expertise to this complex and sensitive task.

I look forward to their report. Its recommendations can affect millions of people. When we give them the best possible global response to AIDS, they will help build our common future.

Thank you.