

June 12, 2017

Subject: Congratulations on your appointment as the Director-General of the World Health Organization

Dear Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus,

As members of an international coalition of civil society organizations working towards achieving the end of malnutrition in all its forms, we congratulate you on your election to Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO).

We stand ready to support you to ensure that the WHO is at the forefront of the fight against malnutrition in all its forms (stunting, wasting, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases). Your leadership will be critical to ensuring that the WHO can guide Member States to scale up their political commitment to nutrition, develop and implement SMART<sup>1</sup> policy actions, and coordinate efforts of multiple stakeholders and sectors. Under your direction, the WHO can hold governments to account for much-needed improvements in the nutritional health of their citizens. In 2012, the World Health Assembly adopted the first ever set of global nutrition targets that aim to increase breastfeeding rates, and reduce child stunting, anaemia in women, child wasting, and child overweight, by 2025. The Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development also include global targets for NCDs and nutrition. This was followed by the announcement in 2016 of the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition, led by WHO and FAO, which highlights key areas where concrete, measurable, and accountable efforts are needed to reach these targets.

Action is critical because virtually every country in the world must contend with one or more forms of malnutrition. More than 1.9 billion adults and 41 million children under 5 worldwide are overweight or obese, with 45% of countries facing a double burden of both undernutrition and overweight & obesity. Undernutrition is the underlying cause of almost half of all deaths of children under the age of 5 years of age. Suboptimal breastfeeding practices contribute to 12% of childhood deaths, equivalent to roughly 800,000 child deaths annually. And sadly, the world is now on the brink of an unprecedented four concurrent famines, where more than 20 million face starvation in South Sudan, Nigeria, Yemen and Somalia. Over 1 million children suffering from severe acute malnutrition (SAM) are at imminent risk of death, with newborns at particularly high risk. The devastating health and development impact of this humanitarian situation warrants urgent attention from the WHO, with a focus on longer term planning and investments to prevent such crises from recurring.

The WHO's commitment to nutrition should be demonstrated through earmarked funding, institutional support, and systematic integration of nutrition into major health initiatives such as Universal Health Coverage (UHC) 2030, and Every Woman Every Child.

Dr. Tedros, as the Minister for Health, and for Foreign Affairs, for the Government of Ethiopia, and a leader on numerous global health initiatives, your work has been instrumental in furthering the UHC agenda and bringing improved health to people around the world. We are keen to work with you and your team to support the implementation of the Nutrition Decade and its workplan.

We hope that under your leadership, the WHO will strengthen its efforts to push countries closer to achieving the global nutrition targets by 2025, and to end malnutrition in all its forms by 2030.

We look forward to supporting you in these efforts.

Yours sincerely,

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<sup>1</sup> SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound

