**51st World Conference on Lung Health**

**Opening Ceremony**

**Claire Forlani**

Good afternoon I’m honored to be here today and to speak with these Distinguished Guests and all the committed people trying to make a difference in the tuberculosis epidemic in these testing and trying times.

It`s been a year since I was in Hyderabad, India, at last year´s conference, spending time with people who have survived TB and who continue to raise awareness of the disease, These people are extraordinarily , they are inspiring and their ability to educate us is integral to bringing an end to this debilitating and horrific disease.

Hyderabad opened my eyes in many ways. Speaking with the TB survivors from around the world taught me that in fact to end any kind of epidemic you need community to be up front and centre of the response.

12 months later in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic I believe this to be truer than ever.

This horrific pandemic is disproportionately affecting the poor and the vulnerable, those people living with pre-existing conditions, ,those people living with chronic diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension, migrant laborers, people working on the frontline who just cannot afford not to work.

And yet the voices of these communities have been largely stifled in many countries across the globe.

Or totally silenced.

This has to change.

Both the HIV and TB responses have shown, we need community to partner with the scientific community, uphold the sanctity of evidence- based policy and hold governments at all levels accountable when they are making decisions that affect the lives of its citizens.

Contact tracing and testing are not new.

They are in fact a key part of the TB playbook.

If the people we vote for are not getting the tracing and the testing right we need those most affected to be at the table and to call the decision makers out.

And going forward we are convinced in the TB community that if we are to deliver safe and equitable vaccines we have to insist that community is part of the equation – both in their oversight but also in their delivery around the world.

TODAY, TB doesn`t yet have an effective vaccine BUT it is preventable, treatable and curable. And yet for years and years now the disease has been needlessly killing 4000 people every day. That´s right, 1.5 million people die each year from TB but Governments aren’t listening, this it seems is not headline worthy.

The TB epidemic deserves headlines.

Maybe the COVID-19 pandemic will deliver the most urgent one: Government - invest in the health of all of your citizens.

We can only hope it reverberates.

Thank you

Enjoy The Union World Conference.