**OPENING CEREMONY SPEECH – José Luis Castro**

Your Imperial Highness Crown Princess Akishino of Japan, President Clinton, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, honoured guests, distinguished members of The Union, conference participants, welcome to the 51st Union World Conference on Lung Health…

This is a historic year for The Union, our centennial anniversary.

One hundred years ago, The Union was founded out of the rubble of World War I – in the aftermath of a crisis on a scale the world had never seen before.

Now we are facing another global crisis – one that threatens to destroy health systems, and is destabilizing countries around the world.

And as before, we are seeing the public health community rise to the occasion.

Researchers are developing diagnostics, treatments, and new vaccines in record time.

The word “health worker” has become synonymous with “hero.”

The public health community is a model for the world today – you are showing what it means to put aside our differences and work together for the good of the whole planet.

Now is the time for us to stand together and make sure that the world is never unprepared for a crisis like this again.

Here in this conference, we have members of affected communities, doctors, nurses, scientists, researchers, government officials and advocates.

It is up to us.

Today, we have more knowledge, more technology, more resources and more connectivity than humanity has had at any other time in history.

We have the power to see that the Sustainable Development Goals are not just good ideas that get put aside when crisis arises – but that these are commitments we’ve made to each other, no matter what.

It is up to us.

This coming March, we will be halfway to the point when governments promised to ensure 30 million people access TB treatment. It is within their power to fulfill this promise.

Who will hold them accountable?

Right now the tobacco industry is exploiting the pandemic – using it to try to weaken policies and regulations meant to protect people from tobacco.

Who will stand up to them?

The people who founded The Union were not just thinkers. They were champions of action.

Some of them were people whose countries were still in rubble when they founded the organization.

Yet they founded The Union in a spirit of triumph. They refused to accept a reality where humanity was defeated, whether by conflict or by plague.

They knew that all of us are bound together, and they forged ties that broke down barriers and transcended the toxic politics of the time.

As we move into our second century as members of The Union, this is still our calling.

We all know it will take a long time to recover from this pandemic. And the world will be forever changed because of it.

The question is: in what way will the world change?

Let us use this crisis to achieve the most important outcome of all: to see that every human being, no matter who they are or where they live, attains their right to health.

It is up to us.

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