TALKING POINTS / SPEECH (Length should match speaking time)

Your Imperial Highness, honorable guests, colleagues and friends,

I am privileged to be part of the launch of this 51st Union World Conference on Lung Health. The theme - Advancing Prevention – really MUST be a call to action in these days of global pandemics.

And we are really talking about converging pandemics here! COVID-19, HIV, TB…

Before COVID-19, TB remained the leading cause of death for people living with HIV. We are not doing enough to find active TB among people living with HIV…with half of HIV-TB cases still being missed each year! And we’ve ***really only started*** to do enough to PREVENT TB among people living with HIV.

And then comes COVID-19. Threats of service interruption for HIV and TB are very very real—we’ve already seen them. Modeling with UNAIDS and WHO projects that a 6 month interruption in **HIV treatment alone** in sub-saharan Africa could lead to massive losses of life—500,000 additional deaths, bringing us back to 2008 levels—we could lose a decade of progress in just one year.

And so we cannot let COVID-19 be an insurmountable “hurdle” to progress in preventing TB and HIV. Afterall, we’ve been overcoming HURDLES together for decades. For example:

* Even when multiple studies proved the safety and effectiveness of TB Preventive Therapy (TPT), with TPT promoted by WHO since 2004, it took decades to overcome health worker and community doubts, and to mobilize specific funding TPT.
  + And we’ve now seen progress--reaching one million people living with HIV on TPT in 2016 and 2017 and now to 3.5 million in 2019. Now’s not the time to slow down.
* And with COVID-19, the world is now seeing the impact of the hurdles we’ve only partially overcome over the years:
  + Hurdles to fully achieving hospital infection control and healthworker safety, despite clear WHO guidelines and interventions like TB basics to rapidly transform settings.
  + Hurdles to capacity for contract tracing, too few investments over in the human resources and technologies needed to do it right.
* And only now do we hear more leaders talking about the challenges of the ‘built environment’ to prevention—crowded spaces, lack of light and ventilation, challenges to cough hygiene…things the TB community has known since early in the last century.

So I challenge all of us to not lose momentum during this challenging COVID time—but instead to “team up” and shout **loudly**--now more than ever—for aggressive investment in these colliding epidemics: in preventive therapy, infection control and healthworker safety, scaled modern contact tracing, built environments and the social and economic supports people need.

To do that successfully, we need communities. Community-led organizations of people affected ***by*** people affected working ***for*** people affected. Community-led organizations at the governance and policy levels, also providing services, also being the watchdogs to verify that what’s been promised is actually being delivered. And to do this, they need to be directly financed and fully equipped.

Overcoming COVID-19, TB, HIV and future pandemics requires global solidarity. Together we must develop and **equitably distribute** combination prevention and treatment and vaccines to all—true access that prioritizes those who need it most.

Thank you and I wish you all a powerful conference!