**Video message**

**51st Union World Conference on Lung Health**

**International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease**

**20 October 2020**

President Clinton,

Dear colleagues and friends,

COVID-19 is a stark reminder that the simple act of breathing is fundamental to life, and of the devastating effects of anything that takes our breath away, including tuberculosis, tobacco and air pollution.

This microbe attacks the lungs, but its effects are felt far beyond, in families, communities, health systems, societies, and economies.

The pandemic has taken a heavy toll on services for many diseases, including TB, with sharp drops in TB notifications reported to WHO from several high-burden countries. This could lead to an additional 400,000 TB deaths this year alone.

The pandemic also compounds the tobacco epidemic, with smokers more likely to develop severe disease with COVID-19.

COVID-19 threatens to unwind the progress we have made in recent years to prevent and control tuberculosis and other lung diseases.

The impacts of the disease itself and the response to it, including stay-at-home orders and other so-called lockdown restrictions, exacerbate many of the driving factors of TB, including poverty, inequality and stigma.

But we cannot allow the pandemic to become an excuse for failing to deliver on the commitments we have made to End TB, tobacco and air pollution.

Quite the opposite: the pandemic is showing us why we must work with even more determination, collaboration and innovation to meet those commitments.

Even as researchers race to develop a vaccine for COVID-19, we already have the tools to prevent, diagnose, treat and control TB, and to help tobacco users to quit.

WHO is working with countries to ensure life-saving services continue for people with TB and related conditions including hypertension, diabetes, asthma and lung cancer.

Many countries are responding with innovative efforts to deliver medication, telemedicine and care closer to patients’ homes.

The pandemic will end. But TB, tobacco, air pollution and other lung diseases will continue to steal the breath and life of millions of people every year.

COVID-19 is reminding us all that life is fragile and health is the most precious commodity on earth.

Together, we must harness the same urgency and solidarity with which the world is fighting COVID-19 to make sure everyone, everywhere can breathe freely and cleanly.

I thank you.

[362 words]