



**Statement**  
**of the European Union**  
**by**

**Antonio Parenti**  
Minister Counsellor,  
Head of Section Economic, Trade and Development  
**Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations**

On the occasion of the  
**Virtual Briefing on COVID-19 and universal health coverage (UHC)**  
of the  
**Group of Friends of Universal Health Coverage and Global Health**

9:00 am-11:00 am, Friday 15 May 2020

New York

Excellencies, distinguished participants,

**Thank you** for this opportunity to exchange on this crucial topic. In fact the importance of UHC and global health might never have been more clear than in these days of the unprecedented global crisis caused by COVID-19. We painfully **experience today what was reaffirmed last year in the UHC political declaration**: health is a *precondition* for and at the same time an *outcome and indicator* of the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Already before the crisis we knew that the **level of progress and investment was insufficient to meet the UHC target 3.8 of the SDGs** with at least half of the world's population lacking access to essential health services, more than 800 million people bearing the burden of catastrophic out-of-pocket spending on health.

And already before the crisis we knew about the linkages between animal health and human health: **zoonosis** like COVID19 being a major threat to human health and therefore requiring an integrated and multisectoral **OneHealth approach** for better prevention. It is estimated that at least 75% of emerging human infectious diseases are of animal origin. **Biodiversity loss** and other environmental factors can contribute to this risk.

But it is also well known that our health is significantly threatened by **adverse impacts of climate change and other environmental determinants**, such as clean air and safe drinking water. Our health is directly related to the health of the environment we live in. WHO data is clear on this: together, air, water and chemical hazards kill some 12.6 million people a year. This cannot and must not continue.

As this crisis shows: our health is the most precious we have – this is where we all collectively agreed on drastic measures to prevent and protect our health. Therefore we should look at lessons-learned and **see the crisis as an opportunity to do better in the future**. We must now **get a new understanding how human health and planetary health are intertwined** and how existing inequalities are making us more vulnerable. In the **build-back-better strategies** it is therefore important to assure that:

- strong and resilient health systems, also equally reaching those who are in vulnerable situations and being capable of effectively implementing the International Health Regulations to ensure pandemic preparedness.
- and that we break up the silos: we need high impact policies comprehensively addressing social, economic and environmental aspects of health by working across all sectors through applying a broad OneHealth and a health-in-all-policies approach.

**The EU** is a huge supporter of UHC and Global Health and strong in the response of the crisis. The “Team Europe” package to support partner countries in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic and its consequences combines resources from the EU, its Member States and financial institutions and to-date reaches more than 20 billion Euros. And in support of the development of diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines the EU started a pledging effort which already generated 7.4 billion Euros.

As a strong supporter of UHC and Global Health I also want to use this opportunity to announce that **the EU would be honoured to become part of this group**.

We are looking forward to future constructive sessions and discussions. Thank you.