

**VIRTUAL BRIEFING ON  
COVID-19 and UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE  
15 May 2020**

**Full Remarks by  
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I thank the conveners for today's meeting.

The pandemic has put to a severe stress test for every emergency response system that national governments have historically thought or believed to be robust.

And we have all been witness...results have been a mixed bag and in most cases disastrous.

Our health systems are only as strong as the data that is available.

The Pandemic has transformed the way in which the national governments and the global health community have come to accept, use, and deploy digital health, drones, robotic, and contact tracing technologies. Technologies that were considered intrusive just a few months back have come to be adopted.

Surveillance and preparedness are not just for Tsunamis and nuclear catastrophes.

Going forward it would important for the world to think about how vaccine development and advanced medical research are conducted and how the results shared. The surge in demand for vaccines and drugs to be declared as a public good needs to be delicately balanced with shareholder expectations.

Global pharmaceutical supply chains and logistics operations will have to be rewired to suit a post-COVID19 world.

Health is like money, we never have a true idea of its value until we lose it.

India has taken a series measures to ensure access to healthcare to the poorest and the most vulnerable, through the flagship National Health Protection Mission also known as Ayushman Bharat.

To strengthen the country's response to COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of India has made the testing and treatment for COVID-19 available under this programme. The testing and treatment of COVID -19 was already available for free in the public facilities. Now, more than 500 million people covered under this scheme are able to avail free testing and treatment for COVID -19.

In order to free-up capacities in public hospitals dedicated to provide care to COVID patients, more private hospitals are being brought under the network of this programme. This is to ensure that non-COVID patients who need critical care such as chemotherapy, dialysis or urgent surgery are properly attended. Expanding the network of hospitals also creates capacity to take care of any surge in hospitalization cases in a post-COVID scenario where people come back to hospitals in large numbers to undergo elective procedures.

India has designed and launched Aarogya Setu App, India's main contact tracing technology. It has become the world's fastest app to reach 50 million downloads in first 13 days.

Aarogya Setu is designed to keep track of other app users that a person came in contact with. It then alerts app users if any of the contacts tests positive for COVID-19. The app also allows to declare if any user who tests positive or faces symptoms of COVID-19 in a self-assessment survey. Based on this, other persons who have come in contact with the COVID positive person are traced. Healthcare professionals then establish contacts with affected and vulnerable patients and advise them.

Data is critical to responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. An array of real-time data that are relevant to the pandemic are being collected on a regular basis for effective surveillance and preparedness.

India remains steadfast in its support to the global efforts to respond to the pandemic. We have extended support to over 100 countries in their efforts to combat the pandemic and will continue to do that.

We have promptly responded to the requests from countries to deploy Rapid Response Teams and have undertaken a number of medical and supply missions across the globe. We have significantly increased production of PPEs and essential medicines in a short time. We have removed export restrictions to facilitate access to essential medicines and have facilitated access through humanitarian aid as well as commercial routes.

Going forward we need to strengthen communities with surveillance systems preferably built into primary health care, expanding insurance coverage, increasing public awareness, ensure access to medicines, diagnostics and equipment, and train and recruit more healthcare professionals.

Most importantly we need governmental stewardship for creating strong and resilient health systems and a whole-of-government approach that targets all social determinants of health, as well as ensure sufficient investment in healthcare research and innovation.

The path to recovery from COVID-19 pandemic is difficult and calls for resilient health systems. The pandemic has only reinforced the importance of Universal Health Coverage and the need to join hands and remain committed to this path.

I thank you.