

Mr/Madam President, Madame Director General, my fellow Ministers, ladies and gentlemen.

Today we are discussing importance of building resilient and responsive health systems in the age of sustainable development. The performance of health system and its ability to provide services to all without risk of financial hardship must be a fundamental priority. Universal health coverage - is the best way to achieve the health Sustainable Development Goal – and is an important way to expand access to effective health-care services, reduce financial hardship during illness, and improve health outcomes.

The Universal Health Care Program launched by the Government of Georgia in 2013 has led to a major expansion in population entitlement to publicly financed health services, from 29% to over 90% of the population. The progress is notable. Out of pocket expenses on health and likelihood of impoverishment due to out-of-pocket payments have reduced by 25%, and utilization of health services significantly increased.

Our major challenge in terms of health equity is affordable access to essential medicines. Out-of-pocket payments are mainly driven by household spending on outpatient medicines.

Georgia is committed to Universal Health Care and determined to build on recent successes. We are moving towards progressive universalism in which expanding access to essential medicines and to medicines that could drive people to poverty is our main priority. In this regard I want to highlight our key developments:

- In April 2017, the Georgian Ministry of Labor, Health, and Social Affairs introduced policies for enhanced protection for poorer and sicker people by expanding their benefit package and including medicines for major Non-Communicable Diseases – cardio-vascular, type 2 diabetes, obstructive pulmonary disease and thyroid conditions which together with cancer account for more than 80 percent of the burden of disease in Georgia. Over 600 000 people, people most in need, will receive coverage with these essential medicines through the primary health care settings. These policies support our efforts to strengthen primary health care system and improve health outcomes related to non-communicable diseases in Georgia, contribute to achieving NCD targets and SDG health goal.
- Last year, I had an honor to present in detail about our flagship program that was in the early stages of development– the world first Hepatitis C elimination – implemented by the Ministry with support of our international partners US CDC, WHO and pharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences. I would like to share with you the recent progress and the numbers. But these are not only the numbers. Beyond these numbers are people's lives, their families and prospects for an entire society. In just 2 years, we enrolled over 37,500 and over 29,000 completed the treatment with

free high-quality Hepatitis C drugs – Harvoni, provided by Gilead. We have over 98% treatment success rate.

This public-private partnership established to tackle Hepatitis C shows that access to medicines and quality of care can be improved through stronger partnership among governments, pharmaceutical companies, health services providers and the civil society.

No doubt, that this public-private partnership is an excellent opportunity and also a development model to upgrade and advance healthcare system in Georgia given the policies and improvements introduced in the area of infection prevention and control in health care settings (and beyond), blood bank standards, and linkages of care.

Finally, towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - leaving no one behind, I want to highlight our sharper focus on innovative approaches for improving maternal and child health, and reproductive health. Georgia has made a steady progress in health outcomes for mothers and children. The emphasis we are having is not only on increasing access to care, but also on improving quality of care provided to women and children through services regionalization, quality and effectiveness of care measurement, and better regulations.

With the development and launch of the first ever Georgian National Strategy (2017–2030) and the three-year Action Plan for Safe Motherhood and Newborn Care, Reproductive Health and Adolescent SRH there is a stronger government ownership and support to achieve highest attainable standard of health for all women, children and adolescents.

Thank you for your attention!