



**The Third UN High Level Meeting on NCDs
Time to Deliver**

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**Key note speech by HRH Princess Dina Mired
Eminent Champion of NCDs**

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Your Royal Highnesses, Excellencies, Colleagues

7 years and 7 days ago, I was right here, at the first High level meeting on NCDs standing at this very solemn podium, looking less wrinkled perhaps, but with lots of vigor, determination and hope. At the time, I understood and felt the gravity of the occasion, not just as a keynote speaker on behalf of civil society, but as the voice of the 36 million souls worldwide who were dying from the leading killer diseases of our time; cancer, diabetes, heart disease, chronic respiratory and mental illnesses and others. Especially those living in developing countries, who are still bearing the brunt of the greatest carnage. And yet despite the solemnity of the task, during the preparation of my speech, words poured out so easily. In fact, it felt like my speech literally wrote itself in one go.

At the time, we had to debunk the myths that NCDs only affected the developed world, and we had to impress upon you all to add a new acronym on the big list of UN acronyms. When we spelled out the letters N C D, etching non-communicable diseases front and center on our list of

diseases to pay attention to immediately ... we, the passionate, committed players in civil society, all felt that we had finally hit the big league...

This time around however, I have to confess that I have struggled. I wrote, rewrote and crumpled many papers. I was at a loss for words. And believe me, this is something I am never accused of!

Why? because, since our UNHLM in 2011, Progress has been too slow. In fact, according to a recent study "NCD Countdown 2030" published by The Lancet with collaboration from, WHO, NCDA and Imperial College London to track progress on NCDs.

"It seems that more than half of all countries are not on track to meet the SDG 3.4 NCD mortality target; and progress has stagnated or actually increased since 2010 in 15 countries for women and 24 countries for men."

Mindboggling. A depressing statistic given the enormity of the challenge and the gargantuan injustice wreaked on the afflicted....

And this despite the fact that, Since 2011, we in civil society and the World Health Organisation have done *everything* in our power to support countries in their fight against NCDs.

We advocated hard for the framework to have global targets with the overarching goal to reduce premature mortality 25% by 2025. Then we have properly argued that NCDs are a development issue and not simply a health issue, making the political and economic case for them to enter the elite club of the SDG's. Together, we reframed our call to action in dollar terms, to ensure that finance ministers understand that investing in NCD prevention, treatment and cure is not only a sound economic decision but also a high-yielding investment. We have shown that investing \$1.27 now on NCD prevention will yield a return of \$7 per year in 2030, totaling US\$ 350 billion dollars. in 2030 around the world.350 billion dollars.

In parallel, we have supported and developed evidence-based tools and guidance documents, initiatives such as the Global Initiative for Cancer Registries (GICR) and the RESOLVE initiative. We even rolled up our sleeves and put boots on the ground through initiatives like UICC's City Cancer Challenge /CCan 2025 initiative and the Bloomberg Partnership for Healthy Cities, which support cities to develop strong, sustainable and impactful Cancer and NCD programmes at city levels. The work of our colleagues in WHO over the last 7 years has given us a suite of 'Best Buys' for all to take efficient and cost-effective action on NCD prevention, treatment and care no matter their income levels.

So, we deleted the box of "we don't know what to do", we erased the "no money argument", and we nullified the notion of the *impossible, the challenging and the complex*. And yet 15 million people are still dying prematurely every year right before our eyes.

So, forgive me for having been at a loss for words... How does one explain the obvious and the urgent over and over again to spur serious meaningful action? What else should we do to get *the* political and economic attention needed to start implementation **on the ground**? The writing is on the wall...

As we speak, we are currently well on track moving decidedly to an unhealthy and injurious future, unless we resolve today to deliver on our promises and accelerate progress.

We need to ask ourselves" what legacy do we want our generation to be known for? The one that watched the NCD epidemic destroy the lives of our children and our children's children, or the generation that said enough is enough and took action...the weight of this seminal decision is on your shoulders.

We understand the challenges that you all face as heads of states and health ministers especially in resource challenged countries. We understand the obstacles on the

ground, where a health minister, in a low middle-income country, who for so long only focused on communicable diseases, now has to find the funds to purchase for example a much-needed linear accelerator costing millions of dollars whilst fighting an epidemic of malaria or TB. And all this without assistance from a global-type fund. or other international assistance. Sometimes, it seems to many of us, that it is easier to fund weapons to wage war that destroys human lives, than it is to financially support the wholesome actions that will save them. But, as Martin Luther King Jr. said, "We refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt".

Yes, we put ourselves in your shoes, but we also walked in the uncomfortable and distressed shoes of the long-suffering patient who has to make the unconscionable decision on whether to put food on the table or to get their lifesaving chemotherapy medication, that is if it were even available, affordable or accessible. As president elect, of the Union for International Cancer Control, I witness this inequity firsthand every time I visit a developing country.

So, I am here to think out loud with you all to try and understand what it is that is paralyzing us from doing more of the right thing ...

Perhaps, we all have to remind ourselves that we really cannot simply wish these diseases away. These diseases are here to stay unless we act to stop them. NCDs, as the serial killers of our time, are non-discriminate, expansive, consistent, swift, strategic and certainly very comprehensive and universal in their approach.

But what accelerates their deadly work is our **own** fragmented, indecisive and inactive approach. When a government does not stick a visible "wanted poster" front and center on its agenda, then NCDs roam free. When governments do not post a reward - "prizemoney" for catching these serial killers, putting money where their mouth is, then NCDs still roam free. When governments ignore the most vulnerable to the NCD serial killer; the poor and the un-informed, then NCDs roam free.

Let us make our solemn vows today, to deliver on our promises...

- Let us Put NCDs as the number one item on the cabinet of Ministers' agenda, not just the health Minister, the whole cabinet agenda, with targets and time bound commitments.
- Let us invest seriously in NCD prevention and treatment to stop the factories of disease.
- Let us implement WHO's evidence based "best buys" to fight NCDs
- Let us make vaccinations available in all countries to limit the adult development of cancers and in particular cervical cancer.
- Let us tax the industries that break us, instead of giving them a tax break...including sugar, sugar, sugar, salt, alcohol and tobacco

- Let us invest in data to track, monitor and report in 2025 the progress we made
- Let us legislate against industries who are intent on profiting at the expense of our health.
- Starting with the tobacco industry. For the love of GOD, fully implement the FCTC to stop them owning the best real estate in the world - the billions and billions of vibrant airy youthful lungs ready to consume their deadly product.

And it can be done, we **have** seen some shining examples of what can be done with political will in some countries. Many countries have established NCD plans and a few countries have “operational plans”, meaning plans that are off the shelf and are being implemented.

And, in the 15 years I spent as Director General of the King Hussein Cancer Foundation, as part of the team that saw the transformation of cancer care in Jordan, I saw and

experienced firsthand what political will, planning, organization, systemization and hard work can achieve.

Yes, it can be done.

Seeing 59 Heads of State, gives me renewed hope. 59 heads of state with your busy schedules, making the time to attend this meeting, sends a resounding message to all NCD patients, ... "no more mountains of unnecessarily amputated legs littered due to insulin unavailability", "no more a child with leukemia in a low-middle income country having to accept the inevitability of a measly 10% chance for a cure for a disease that can be cured in the developed world" ... and "no more a refugee inflicted with cancer or diabetes, who has escaped the violence of war only to be subjected again to the violence of inaction on NCDs" ...and permit me to digress for a moment here, but "who, when, where and how was it decided that refugees are a special super human breed who are only in need of basic emergency services?!!!"

The world is watching this meeting today including the millions of People living with diabetes, cancer, heart disease, lung disease, Alzheimer's and other NCDs. Every letter and every word you approve in this political declaration translates into something real ... You can provide insulin, palliative care or essential cancer medications for millions at an affordable price, or - with a simple pen stroke - you can take it all away from those who need it most. Yes, it is very personal and very real. You, our leaders, are in the driver's seat. We count on **you** to do the right thing and steer us all to safety.

Let us vow to make this UN HLM *the* seminal meeting that will finally start to deliver on the ground.

...and be encouraged by the words of one my heroes

Nelson Mandela

"It always seems impossible until it is done".

Thank You