

**UN Water Decade Preparatory Meeting**

October 25, 2022, CR4, 10:00AM

**Statement of the Co-Chairs of the Group of Friends on WASH in Healthcare Facilities**

Thank you, Chair.

I am pleased to deliver this statement on behalf of the Co-Chairs of the Group of Friends of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in Healthcare Facilities, the Permanent Representatives of the Philippines and Hungary.

With the launch of the UN Water Decade (2018-2028), UN member states have been called upon to take concrete, collective action against the growing threat of a critical shortfall in freshwater resources by 2030, particularly in regions of the world that are already experiencing significant water stress.

The implications of water inadequacy are vast. Nowhere is the challenge more evident than in the strong links between adequate water, sanitation, hygiene, and health. Access to WASH in healthcare facilities is fundamental to the achievement of universal health coverage and central to progress achieving the SDGs.

In 2015, for the first time, the WHO and UNICEF assessed the status of WASH in healthcare facilities in low- and middle-income countries. The assessment found that nearly 40% of facilities lacked improved water, and nearly 20% without sanitation.<sup>1</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic gave particular attention on WASH. It is crucial that WASH in healthcare facilities must be a priority in the healthcare sector and be included in the development assistance in healthcare to prevent the spread of diseases. It is unconscionable that, today, half of the healthcare facilities worldwide lack basic hygiene services. The situation is worse in the least developed countries, where two-thirds of healthcare facilities do not provide WASH services.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/wash-in-health-care-facilities-for-maternal-newborn-and-child-health>

Without access to adequate and safe water, healthcare facilities cannot provide basic, routine services, including safe surgery and infection prevention. In healthcare facilities that lack basic WASH services, vast numbers of patients are diagnosed with hospital-acquired infections. Moreover, the risk is enormous for healthcare workers who are on the front lines, day in and day out.

Improvements in WASH and wastewater management in all sectors are critical elements of preventing infections and reducing the spread of antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

Pathogens are spread by poor sanitation and contaminated water and cause an estimated 80% of diseases in many developing countries. The global trend of cholera outbreaks is becoming more widespread and severe due to factors that limit access to clean water, among others. Since January this year, 29 countries have reported cholera cases, with some facing large outbreaks. In comparison, in the previous 5 years, fewer than 20 countries on average reported outbreaks. The challenges associated with pandemic preparedness and response cannot be achievable without adequate, essential WASH services in all healthcare facilities.

While medical interventions strive to out-pace the destructive impact of disease, WASH services in healthcare facilities continue to be the strongest measure of protection available in this effort. No technological breakthrough is needed to obtain clean water within the facility, along with soap and functioning toilets.

Water and sanitation interventions in healthcare facilities are achievable and cost-effective throughout most of the world. The WHO estimates the cost for these services across the least developed countries to be under \$1 per person per year, and a fraction of what is currently spent on healthcare services in those countries.

Achieving universal access to WASH in healthcare facilities requires political will and strong leadership at both national and facility levels, and it is highly cost-effective, yielding substantial health benefits.

In March 2018 UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued a global Call to Action specifically aimed at ensuring adequate water, sanitation, and hygiene in healthcare facilities worldwide by 2030.

The World Health Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution, urging governments to take immediate action to improve water, sanitation, and hygiene conditions in healthcare facilities in all settings – urban and rural.

Last year, the Group of Friends of WASH in Healthcare Facilities co-chaired by the Philippines and Hungary in partnership with the World Health Organization was established. The Group of Friends serves as informal platform at the UN to raise awareness, exchange information, share best practices, support initiatives and mobilize resources directed at addressing the very solvable inadequacies of WASH in hospitals, health clinics, and birthing centers wherever needed.

Mr. Chair, it is important to make this Water Decade an occasion to accomplish the goals set forth in the UN Call to Action and World Health Assembly resolution on this important issue of water and health.

Thank you.