

18 June 2020

Your Excellency,

It is a great honour for us to call on your leadership in securing political and financial support to achieve universal health coverage (UHC) by 2030 and ensuring an urgent focus on public health actions as the first step towards UHC. This includes prioritizing investment in strong, equitable and resilient health systems based on primary health care (PHC) that can respond to emergencies effectively and reach the whole of the population to leave no one behind. The COVID-19 pandemic is a sharp reminder that everyone, everywhere should have access to quality and affordable health services. It is clearly showing that the choice is not health security or UHC - strong systems grounded in PHC are needed for both.

[The International Health Partnership for UHC 2030 \(UHC2030\)](#), is a movement to accelerate progress toward UHC by providing a multi-stakeholder platform that promotes collaboration on health systems strengthening at the global level and in countries around the world. We promote enhanced commitments for UHC, more coherent health systems strengthening by all relevant health partners, inclusive approaches, and accountability for results. In 2019, UHC2030 played an instrumental role in bringing together diverse voices and securing historic commitments at the United Nations High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage (UN HLM). To do this, we produced [a set of Key Asks from the UHC movement](#), which ultimately influenced the successful political outcomes of the meeting. [The Inter-Parliamentary Union \(IPU\) joined UHC2030 in 2019](#) and the President of IPU is a member of the UHC Movement Political Advisory Panel of UHC2030.

As many of you are moving into the final stage of the next national budgetary cycle, we would like to offer our humble advice on possible ways to take forward [the commitments that you made towards UHC at the 141<sup>st</sup> IPU Assembly](#). In April, [we issued a statement](#) urging world leaders to remember their commitments made at the UN HLM, which are included in the most ambitious and comprehensive [political declaration](#) on health in history. We believe that [commitments in the seven key areas of the declaration](#) must not be forgotten during this state of emergency as they can help guide the pandemic and post-pandemic response.

UHC by definition includes disease prevention, health promotion and emergency preparedness. Priorities for parliaments should be to [fund public health 'common goods for health'](#), such as comprehensive surveillance, laboratories, information systems, information, education and communication starting at the community – to strengthen both emergency preparedness and PHC. Such public health functions have not been sufficiently prioritized in recent years, which is evident through the lack of preparedness for COVID-19 even in countries generally considered to have strong health systems and economies. There is a strong case to position public health action as the first step towards UHC and reinforce that it is a core responsibility of governments.

The current pandemic also provides a compelling reason to [prioritize investments in health now – for both health and economic reasons](#). The costs of inaction vastly outweigh the costs of investing in public health functions and outbreak preparedness. The costs of responding to the pandemic and the resulting economic recession have been and will continue to be immense, undermining progress in reducing poverty and inequity over the past decades. Therefore, health policies should prioritize public financing and remove financial barriers to services at the point of use. It is undeniable that parliamentarians are facing hard choices, navigating between controlling the outbreak while protecting other essential health

services, mitigating the 'indirect' effects of COVID-19, and restoring the economy. However, experience shows that effective epidemic control and protecting the most vulnerable benefits the economy.

Last but not least, it is important that parliaments encourage governments to embark on a **'whole of society' approach with strong accountability, gender equity and the empowerment of women** in shaping health emergency preparedness and response, which involve communities and all relevant stakeholders and organizations, including civil society and the private sector. COVID-19 reinforces the importance of governments seeing local communities, women and affected populations as part of the solution to the epidemic and working closely with them, taking into account the specific needs of all women and girls, which experience shows leads to better outcomes. An effective response necessitates that governments are trusted so that their strategies are supported, as well as having strong management across multiple stakeholders and organizations, with clear accountability.

Simply put, **investments in the public health 'common goods for health', which build strong, equitable and resilient health systems**, will save lives and protect the economy, now and in the future. We are calling on all parliaments to invest in more equitable and resilient health systems, which ensure access to needed services with financial protection in both normal times and emergencies.

We reaffirm our commitment to work together with broader country and community partners to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages under the umbrella of UHC and would value stronger collaboration with parliamentarians. You will find UHC2030's key resource documents on above matters are enclosed in this letter for your consideration in the upcoming national budgetary processes.

Yours faithfully,



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Co-Chair, UHC2030



Dr. Githinji Gitahi  
Co-Chair, UHC2030



Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron  
President, Inter-Parliamentary Union

***This joint letter is issued in consultation with the UHC Movement Political Advisory Panel:***

**Mr. Elhadj As Sy**, Chair of the Board, Kofi Annan Foundation

**Ms. Emilia Saiz**, Secretary General of the United Cities and Local Governments

**Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland**, Member of The Elders

**Prof. Keizo Takemi**, Member of the House of Councillors, Japan

**Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés**, President of the 73rd Session of the UN General Assembly

**Dr. Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis**, Former European Commissioner

**Annex:**

- [Faced by the COVID-19 crisis, it is crucial that world leaders remember their UHC commitments](#)
- [Living with COVID-19: Time to get our act together on health emergencies and UHC](#)
- [United Nations High-Level Meeting on UHC, Key Targets, Commitments and Actions](#)
- [Political declaration of the high-level meeting on UHC \(74<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution\)](#)
- [Achieving UHC by 2030: The role of parliaments in ensuring the right to health \(IPU Resolution\)](#)
- [How COVID-19 is reshaping priorities for both domestic resources and development assistance in the health sector](#)

**TO:**

Presidents of Parliaments