
SIDS MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON NCDs AND MENTAL HEALTH

DR. BARBOSA'S CLOSING REMARKS DURING THE HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

15 JUNE 2023

Honorable Heads of governments, Ministers, distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

It has been an honor to be part of this historic SIDS Ministerial Conference on NCDs and mental health, and to bear witness to the high-level commitments expressed in this session to improve prevention and control efforts in SIDS countries.

Throughout this conference, we have discussed the many challenges and unique vulnerabilities that SIDS countries face in tackling major health issues. Coupled with the threat of extreme weather and rising sea waters, the very existence of some island nations is threatened.

Over and over again, we heard about the severe impacts of climate change on these countries, and how those impacts in turn increase incidence of NCDs. The effect of climate change is compounded by the fact that SIDS are already disproportionately represented among countries with the highest risk of dying prematurely from NCDs.

We've also recognized the growing evidence linking climate-related hazards to increased distress and higher rates of mental health conditions.

And these challenges are further magnified in SIDS because of their small size and remote location, leading to a higher cost of imported goods and consequently a higher vulnerability to food insecurity.

These are no small matters.

Yet, it has been motivating and invigorating to learn about the various initiatives and commitments that governments and civil society groups have in place to improve health policies, expand primary care services for NCD diagnosis, and create healthier cities and spaces that promote physical activity, among others.

No one organization or government agency alone can resolve the enormous NCD, mental health, and climate change challenges facing SIDS. This is precisely why PAHO stands with WHO in the commitments expressed by Dr. Tedros, to strengthen technical cooperation for NCDs and mental health, address social determinants of health, and work towards universal health coverage.

Later today, we will learn more about the Outcome Document, developed with all SIDS countries. It provides a solid recommendation for how SIDS countries, together with the global public health community, can move forward on actions for building health system-wide capacity and resilience for the prevention and control of NCDs and mental health conditions.

I stand before you to express my unwavering commitment to act on the recommendations in the Outcome Document, and to help you build stronger, healthier societies in SIDS countries.

Now is the time for us to implement policies to better protect the health of our people.

Now is the time for us to reinvigorate our investments in our health systems to ensure that everyone has access to care and treatment for NCDs and mental health.

And now is the time for us to deliver on the promise of Health for All for everyone – in every country, on every island and in every home.

Thank you.

Dr. Jarbas Barbosa