**GENEVA ¦ 20 May 2013 -- The World Health Organization's** (WHO) **Health Assembly**, the world's largest health policy-making body, opened its
**66th Session**
today in Geneva

with around 3000 participants from around the world. Major health issues to be discussed include: • preventing and controlling noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, cancers and chronic lung disease,
• monitoring of progress countries are making towards the Millennium Development Goals,

• intensification of efforts to eradicate polio,
• efforts to protect more children from vaccine-preventable diseases,
• supporting countries in their efforts to move forward with universal health coverage.
Health in the post-2015 agenda, WHO's budget for 2014-2015, and progress on the Organization's reform are also on the agenda.

In her opening address to the Health Assembly, WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan noted that the world is facing challenging times, including financial crisis, job insecurity, armed conflicts and large numbers of people leaving on edge, fearing for their lives.

"In these troubled times, public health looks more and more like a refuge, a safe harbor of hope that allows, and inspires, all countries to work together for the good of humanity," says Dr Chan.
She also acknowledged the important role of the International Health Regulations for detecting and responding to public health emergencies, including those caused by a new disease.

"The threat from emerging and epidemic-prone diseases is ever-present," said Dr Chan. "I cannot overemphasize the importance of immediate and fully transparent reporting to WHO and of strict adherence to obligations set out in the International Health Regulations."

In addition to the delegates from WHO Member States, representatives from many agencies, organizations, foundations and other groups contributing to improving public health will also be in Geneva to engage in dialogues around key topics at WHO's World Health Assembly.

In a recent survey, about the work of WHO, more than 4 out of 5 key public health stakeholders reported that WHO is either indispensable or important for improving people's health. In addition nearly 90% of these global health participants reported that WHO was the most effective organization at influencing global health policy.

The outcomes of the World Health Assembly are particularly significant this year as the Organization enters a new six-year cycle of health programming as defined in the General Programme of Work. The Health Assembly will also take important decisions on how the Organization continues to move forward reforming itself to be positioned to work effectively in the 21st century health landscape.

Keynote invited speakers addressing the Assembly on Tuesday, 21 May are:

- Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission
- Ms Gunilla Carlsson, Minister for International Development Cooperation, Sweden
- Dr Jim Yong Kim, President of the World Bank Group