Geneva, Switzerland, 26 May 2012

Madam President, excellencies, honourable ministers, distinguished delegates, friends, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I think we can all breathe a sigh of relief that you were able to get through such an important but heavy and demanding agenda. Congratulations to all of you for your hard work, also in evening sessions.

I thank your President for orchestrating the smooth running of this Sixty-fifth World Health Assembly. And I thank her personally for her gracious gift to WHO.

I thank the Chairs of the two committees, and their elected officers, for getting us through our packed agenda with such grace, diplomacy, and welcome doses of humour. I thank the support staff, also for so quickly reproducing the documents you needed to complete your work, and the interpreters.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Your agenda covered some of the biggest challenges, and biggest opportunities, facing public health today.

As challenges, let me mention noncommunicable diseases and ageing, maternal and child health, under- and over-nutrition, the eradication of polio, and health demands during humanitarian emergencies.

As opportunities, let me mention immunization and the decade of vaccines, and the new multisectoral strategies made possible when we take a social determinants approach.

Other opportunities have been opened by the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness framework and the Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health. Both instruments are good models for the future in their pursuit of fairness, accountability, and capacity building.

You have just heard comprehensive reports about the work in the two committees. I will comment on just a few items.

Last year's Political Declaration on noncommunicable diseases gave WHO a number of assignments and responsibilities with tight timelines. During this Assembly, you impressed me with your desire to move forward quickly. Don't lose momentum, you said. Rest assured. We are giving these responsibilities our highest priority.

You reached agreement on NCD resolutions and decisions with appropriate speed, including the historical one on mental disorders.

It took more time for you to reach agreement on the decision pertaining to reform. That's OK. As I have noted before, you move very quickly whenever possible, but with caution, when judged appropriate.

But we do know one thing now, crystal clear. Everyone is in agreement about the need for a social determinants approach to permeate the work of WHO.

You moved the reform agenda forward, and I thank you for this guidance. You have given us some specific assignments. We will do our utmost to complete these, on time, and to your satisfaction.

Your support for polio eradication was overwhelming, with several of you expressing financial commitments. Many of you also offered technical advice and support as the emergency action plan is implemented, particularly concerning vaccines.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At least some credit for the success of this session goes to the good job done by the January EB.

I believe the EB's hard work, especially on resolutions and decisions forwarded to this Assembly, removed some speed bumps that would otherwise have slowed things down.

Let me issue a gentle reminder. As many of you noted, WHO reform also touches on the behaviour of Member States. You worked well in this spirit, adopting more decisions and fewer resolutions than in the past.

This is my reminder. Trust is part of our collaborative spirit. Trust contributes to efficiency.

When a task is entrusted to a governing body, like the EB, and an issue is thoroughly navigated, negotiated, and agreed, trust the integrity of that work. Don't reopen the issue. We lose time, and we lose ground instead of moving forward.

In my opening address, I talked about the importance of looking to innovation. Not rocket science. But frugal, strategic innovation. You did so during this session in the form of that horrible traffic light. Though intrusive, and I think almost universally dreaded, it did help us cover ground more quickly.

After a while, few of you ran the red light. But many got caught by the traffic police, the interpreters, for speeding.

As I conclude, there is one final item that I do need to mention. I am honoured to say that you appointed me for a second term as the Director-General of this Organization.

I accept this honour with deep humility and equally deep determination to serve you, and the people you represent, to the very best of my ability.

During difficult times for the world at large, public health continues to move ahead with ever more ambitious goals, building on clear and measurable achievements. Once again, that famous “spirit of Geneva” prevailed, and you gave birth, often after quite prolonged labour, to some healthy babies.

The events during this session reinforce my conviction that the best days for public health are ahead of us, not behind us.

It is now my great pleasure, in a traditional gesture of gratitude, to hand these gavels to your President, and the chairs of the two committees.

Thank you.