12 December 2014 ¦ GENEVA On December 10 and 11, Ministers of Health and Finance of Ebola-affected countries, international organizations and development partners assembled for a high-level meeting on how to strengthen systems of health in Ebola-affected countries and agreed on what needs to be done to rebuild and strengthen essential health services in these countries.

"People in Ebola-affected countries are dying – not only from Ebola but also from other causes – because the majority of health facilities in these countries are either not functional or people are not using them for fear of contracting Ebola," says Dr. Marie-Paule Kieny, Assistant Director General of Health Systems and Innovation, World Health Organization. "A health system has to be able to both absorb the shock of an emergency like Ebola, and continue to provide regular health services such as immunization and maternal and child care."

Participants of the meeting discussed the need to integrate all health services from clinical care to surveillance, health promotion, disease prevention and management, and palliative care.

Given the movement of people across borders of the Ebola-affected countries, it will also be important to coordinate national health plans across borders and align surveillance systems.

Key areas for improvement include:

- significantly strengthening health workforce;
- enhancing community trust, engagement, and ownership;
- ensuring development of resilient sub-national health systems.

Participants determined that substantial external financing will be needed to address key areas for improvement. This should be coordinated under the leadership of the national government and in accordance with national plans.

The meeting agreed that all sectors of government should be involved – notably health, finance and education.

As next steps, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Margaret Chan, invited governments to convene meetings at the national level, with key partners, to develop country specific plans. These plans should clearly identify needs in terms of health workforce, infrastructure and materials, and how to further engage communities.