**1 March 2016--GENEVA -** Nearly 32 million children across the world live with disabling hearing loss. A new World Health Organization (WHO) report, *Childhood hearing loss: act now, here's how*, suggests that 60% of this can be prevented. It also highlights that if hearing loss is detected early enough, and if children receive the care they need, they can reach their full potential.

"child who struggles to hear may also struggle to learn to speak, underachieve at school and end up socially isolated," says Dr Etienne Krug, Director of the WHO Department for Management of Noncommunicable Diseases, Disability, Violence and Injury Prevention. "But this doesn't have to happen. We have a range of tools to help prevent, detect and treat childhood hearing loss."

**Majority of childhood hearing loss can be prevented**

There are many causes of childhood hearing loss. It is estimated that 40% is attributable to genetic causes; 31% to infections such as measles, mumps, rubella and meningitis; and 17% to complications at birth, including prematurity, low birth weight and neonatal jaundice. In addition, an estimated 4% results from expectant mothers and new-borns unknowingly using medicines that are harmful to hearing.
To prevent childhood hearing loss, immunizing children against diseases and regulating certain medicines and noise levels are vital.

**Mitigating the impact of hearing loss**

Early identification of those children with hearing loss helps to trigger the needed interventions, such as the provision of hearing devices and other communication therapies.

Hearing screening programmes for infants, and pre-school and school-based children, alongside hearing care training for health professionals, can dramatically improve the lives of children. Such programmes ensure that those in need of specialized care receive the interventions they need to be able to communicate, receive education and gain employment later in life.

Raising public awareness about ear and hearing care is another key strategy for reducing hearing loss and associated stigma around the use of hearing devices. Strengthening organizations of people with hearing loss and their families can contribute greatly to this effort.

The WHO report includes case studies from Cambodia, Canada, Thailand, Uganda, United Kingdom, Viet Nam and the United States which showcase the impact that programmes in

these and other countries are having on the lives of children across the world. In settings where public health interventions, such as immunization programmes, are functioning optimally, much of childhood hearing loss is avoided. In others, early detection and treatment are key.

WHO collates data and information on hearing loss to demonstrate its prevalence, causes and impact as well as opportunities for prevention and management; assists countries to develop and implement strategies for hearing care that are integrated into the primary health-care system; and provides technical resources and guidance for planning, implementation and human resource development.