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The Director-General of WHO, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, told delegates to the World Health Assembly today that they had charted a new course for the Organization.

Closing the Assembly, he said that everything WHO did going forward would be evaluated in the light of the "triple billion" targets which were approved this week in WHO's new five-year strategic plan. By 2023 the targets aim to achieve:

- 1 billion more people benefitting from universal health coverage
- 1 billion more people better protected from health emergencies
- 1 billion more people enjoying better health and wellbeing.

On the final day of the Assembly, delegates also came to agreement on maternal, infant and young child nutrition and on poliovirus containment.

Nutrition

Delegates unanimously renewed their commitment to invest and scale up nutrition policies and programmes to improve infant and young child feeding.

Member States discussed efforts to achieve the World Health Assembly Global Nutrition Targets, concluding progress has been slow and uneven, but noted a small step forward in the reduction of stunting, with the number of stunted children under 5 years falling from 169 million in 2010 to 151 million in 2017. WHO is leading global action to improve nutrition, including a global initiative to make all hospitals baby friendly, scaling up prevention of anaemia in adolescent girls, and preventing overweight in children through counselling on complementary feeding. A new report was launched on the implementation of the Code of Marketing Breastmilk Substitutes, highlighting that 6 more countries had adopted or strengthened legislation in 2017 to regulate marketing of breastmilk substitutes.

Polio

With wild poliovirus transmission levels lower than ever before, and the world closer than ever to being polio-free, discussions focused on securing a lasting polio-free world. As at May 2018, only 9 cases due to wild poliovirus had been reported globally, from just 2 countries: Afghanistan and Pakistan. Delegates reviewed emergency plans to interrupt the last remaining strains of the virus.

To prepare for a polio-free world, global poliovirus containment activities continue to be intensified, and Member States adopted a landmark resolution on poliovirus containment. In a limited number of facilities, poliovirus will continue to be retained, post-eradication, to serve critical national and international functions such as the production of polio vaccine or research.

It is crucial that poliovirus materials are appropriately contained under strict biosafety and biosecurity handling and storage conditions to ensure that the virus is not released into the environment, either accidentally or intentionally, to again cause outbreaks of the disease in susceptible populations.

Member States expressed overwhelming commitment to fully implement and finance all strategies to secure a lasting polio-free world in the very near term. Rotary International, speaking on behalf of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (which consists of WHO, Rotary, CDC, UNICEF and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation) offered an impassioned plea to the global community to eradicate a human disease for only the second time in history, and ensure that no child will ever again be paralysed by any form of poliovirus anywhere.

Closing remarks

In his final speech to this year's Assembly, Dr Tedros said that everywhere he went, he had the same message: health as a bridge to peace. "Health has the power to transform an individual's life, but it also has the power to transform families, communities and nations," he told delegates.

The Organization's new 5-year strategic plan, he said, called on WHO to measure its success not by its outputs, but by outcomes - by the measurable impact it delivers where it matters most - in countries.

"Ultimately, the people we serve are not the people with power; they're the people with no power," the Director-General said. He told delegates the true test of whether the discussions held in the Assembly this week were successful would be whether they resulted in real change on the ground and he urged them to go back to their countries with renewed determination to work every day for the health of their people.

"The commitment I have witnessed this week gives me great hope and confidence that together we can promote health, keep the world safe, and serve the vulnerable," he concluded.

http://www.who.int/news-room/detail/26-05-2018-seventy-first-world-health-assembly-update-26-may