Declaration of Astana charts course to achieve universal health coverage, 40 years since declaration on primary health care in Alma-Ata

ASTANA, KAZAKHSTAN (25 October 2018) – Countries around the globe today signed the Declaration of Astana, vowing to strengthen their primary health care systems as an essential step toward achieving universal health coverage. The Declaration of Astana reaffirms the historic 1978 Declaration of Alma-Ata, the first time world leaders committed to primary health care.

“Today, instead of health for all, we have health for some,” said Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO). “We all have a solemn responsibility to ensure that today’s declaration on primary health care enables every person, everywhere to exercise their fundamental right to health.”

While the 1978 Declaration of Alma-Ata laid a foundation for primary health care, progress over the past four decades has been uneven. At least half the world’s population lacks access to essential health services – including care for noncommunicable and communicable diseases, maternal and child health, mental health, and sexual and reproductive health.

“Although the world is a healthier place for children today than ever before, close to 6 million children die every year before their fifth birthday mostly from preventable causes, and more than 150 million are stunted,” said Henrietta Fore, UNICEF Executive Director. “We as a global community can change that, by bringing quality health services close to those who need them. That’s what primary health care is about.”

The Declaration of Astana comes amid a growing global movement for greater investment in primary health care to achieve universal health coverage. Health resources have been overwhelmingly focused on single disease interventions rather than strong, comprehensive health systems – a gap highlighted by several health emergencies in recent years.

“Adoption of the Declaration at this global conference in Astana will set new directions for the development of primary health care as a basis of health care systems,” said Bakytzhan Sagintayev, Prime Minister of Kazakhstan. “The new Declaration reflects obligations of countries, people, communities, health care systems and partners to achieve healthier lives through sustainable primary health care.”

UNICEF and WHO will help governments and civil society to act on the Declaration of Astana and encourage them to back the movement. UNICEF and WHO will also support countries in reviewing the implementation of this Declaration, in cooperation with other partners.