17 AUGUST 2016 | **Geneva** – The World Health Organization (WHO) has today named Mr Michael R. Bloomberg, philanthropist and former three-term Mayor of the City of New York, as Global Ambassador for Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs).

NCDs (including heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases) and injuries are responsible for 43 million deaths each year - almost 80% of all deaths worldwide.ÂÂ Each year, 16 million people die from NCDs before the age of 70. Road traffic crashes account for a further 1.25 million deaths each year and are the leading cause of death among young people, aged 15–29 years. The premature death and disability from NCDs and injury can largely be prevented, through implementing proven, cost effective measures.

For the past decade, Bloomberg has been working with WHO on tobacco control and injury prevention. “Michael Bloomberg is a valued partner and has a long track record of supporting WHO in the areas of tobacco control, improving data for health, road safety and drowning prevention,” said Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General. “I am therefore absolutely delighted to be able to appoint him as Global Ambassador for Noncommunicable Diseases. This will enable us to strengthen our response together to the major public health challenges of NCDs and injuries.”

In his new role, Mr Bloomberg will work with national and local political leaders around the globe to highlight the burden of NCDs and injuries. His track record on public health achievements as mayor will enable him to motivate cities to take on the global agenda for NCD and injury prevention. He will help mobilize national and city level political leaders, donors and the private sector to prevent and treat the NCD epidemic and combat injuries.

Through this work, Mr Bloomberg and WHO will be supporting the attainment of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). World leaders have recognized NCDs and injuries as urgent priorities for action in the SDGs. The SDGs contain a number of specific targets for NCDs and injuries, including halving the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents by 2020, reducing by one-third premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases by 2030, and strengthening implementation of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

“I am honored to become WHO Global Ambassador for Noncommunicable Diseases and excited about the possibilities that are within our reach. Cities and countries around the world are making great progress reducing preventable, premature deaths, and by replicating the most effective measures on a global scale, we can save many millions of lives,” said Michael Bloomberg. “Together with WHO, we’ll support low- and middle-income countries as they work to achieve their policy goals and direct resources in ways that will best improve public health. We’ll also work to raise awareness among leaders and policy makers at the local level about the real gains that can be achieved when effective programs are in place.”

Mr. Bloomberg's role and activities will extend the reach of WHO's work to reduce exposure to the main NCD risk factors: tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and the harmful use of alcohol, as well as to promote proven measures to reduce injuries from road traffic crashes, burns, falls and drowning. This includes efforts to strengthen health systems' response to manage NCDs and injuries, and to improve availability of health data to inform policy and programmes.

Effective strategies to prevent NCDs include increasing the tax and price of tobacco and alcohol, enforcing smoke-free environments, implementing large graphic tobacco health warnings, enforcing bans in tobacco advertisement, promotion and sponsorships, promoting the availability of healthy, affordable diets, and discouraging the consumption of foods and beverages high in sugars, salt and fat. Proven actions to prevent the most common forms of injuries include enforcing speed limits, drink-driving legislation and the wearing of seat-belts and helmets, enforcing laws on smoke alarms and hot water tap temperatures, removing or covering water hazards and fencing pools to prevent drowning, eliminating fall hazards and improving balance among the elderly.ÂÂ These are all strategies where both national and local government officials can play a role.