WHO statement by Director-General Dr Chan 16 December 2016. This year ends in uncertain times, for the world's political order, the fate of a damaged planet, the seemingly boundless human suffering experienced by civilians and health care staff in war zones, and the continuing failure of antibiotics that once gave medicine its "miracle" cures.

WHO has chronicled some of the year's major health-related issues.

2016 year in review: key health issues

For example, in 2016, we alerted the world to some alarming trends: the shortage of vaccines in Africa, the harm done to young people's health by gender and social inequalities, increasing deaths in Europe linked to alcohol consumption, the scale of childhood hearing loss, and the massive health consequences of polluted air.

Such alerts stimulate research and encourage action. Working with multiple partners through multiple channels, WHO helped secure dramatic price reductions for the new hepatitis C treatments.

The Ebola outbreak was declared over, and Zika was designated as a public health emergency of international concern, and the world learned that the disease is here to stay.

The successful control of Africa's explosive outbreaks of urban yellow fever tested – and confirmed – WHO's expanded operational capacities under the new programme for health emergencies.

In this operational role, WHO responded with the international community to numerous emergencies caused by natural disasters, armed conflicts in the Middle East, and the vast humanitarian crises in South Sudan and Nigeria. The demands on the resources of the international community, especially in country, were enormous.

On the positive side, the year was an especially good one for tobacco control, with more countries passing laws mandating plain packaging and Uruguay legally defeating the world's largest tobacco company.

Advances in AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria made headlines, as did the outcome of the UN High-level Meeting on Antimicrobial Resistance. The support for universal health coverage keeps getting stronger.

WHO issued economic arguments for investing in mental health and the health workforce, witnessed landmark commitments during the 9th Global Conference on Health Promotion, and urged countries to tax sugar-sweetened beverages.

Some of the best news comes with the shrinking map of infectious diseases. More and more countries are eliminating lymphatic filariasis, blinding trachoma, visceral leishmaniasis,

schistosomiasis, and other neglected tropical diseases, and mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis.

During 2016, the Region of the Americas was declared free of measles, Europe was declared free of malaria, and Region of South East Asia beat maternal and neonatal tetanus.

As a turbulent year comes to a close, WHO and our global partners are helping improve the world in permanent ways.

Advances in global health give the world some of its brightest reasons for hope in 2017.

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http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/statements/2016/end-of-year/en/